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The Intricate Practices of Critically Conscious K-12 Teachers

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The Intricate Practices of Critically Conscious K-12 Teachers

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my parents Anna Montemayor LaFuente and Henry LaFuente. This work would not have been possible without the solid foundation they provided me with as a youth. Since my father passed, my mother has continued to carry the torch. Thank you for your unyielding love and support. Thank you for always leading by example through all the obstacles of life.

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Abstract

The Intricate Practices of Critically Conscious K-12 Teachers

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Being a K-12 teacher is challenging. Some would argue that teaching is even harder for critically conscious educators. The work of critically conscious K-12 educators is more challenging because they are keenly aware of how systems of power and oppression operate throughout the school. They understand how racism, sexism, classism, ableism, etc., impact the lives of students through curriculum and pedagogy. These teachers know that these same forces impact them as professionals, so managing this challenge becomes two-fold. Not only do they have to find ways to protect their students, but they also have to find ways to protect themselves. Strategies among these educators vary, but there are themes that they have in common. This study, then, is necessary to better understand how critically conscious educators do their work. By understanding strategies that these educators implement, contemporary and future educators will have a reference point they can turn to during their own pursuits in implementing critical pedagogies. Educators who participated in this study work to solve the seemingly impossible puzzle of creating a truly democratic educational system for all students. They pour their whole being into pedagogies they believe in, and this is part of their story.

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Chapter One: Introduction

My Story

I have been teaching at Title 1 middle schools for seven years, and students of color were the predominant school population. During my time on these campuses, I witnessed teachers exhibit deficit perspectives (Yosso, 2005; Valencia, 2010) toward students, Schools administrators often catered to the needs of White teachers asymmetrically over teachers of color. And I saw many other normalized forms of oppression that I could feel but, at the time, not name. Most of my colleagues and administrators only implemented pedagogy and curriculum that focused solely on raising students' standardized test scores. To a degree, trying to raise student test scores is understandable because students succeeding on standardized tests is a requirement for teachers and students who want to succeed in this system, but this should not occur at the expense of students' well-being. That was just one piece of collateral damage caused by their being caught up in the neoliberal agenda that support systems of accountability used to blame teachers and students for academic shortcomings instead of the oppressive characteristics of the school system (Picower, 2011; De Lissovoy, 2014).

Every year a new teaching strategy would be introduced as the solution to low standardized test scores, and every year the results were the same. Students and teachers were often burnt out before the end of the year, and scores did not change much. Our campus administration did not accept feedback from grade level teams if it contrasted with their curricular strategies. For some grade level team's curriculum and pedagogy

were so micromanaged that teachers were only allowed to plan a portion of their lessons, and instructional coaches along with administrators planned the rest. The mandated pacing of these lessons was inconsiderate of students and left many of them academically behind because they were not given enough time to complete assignments during class. When members of our grade level professional learning community (PLC) inquired about the negative impact this strategy had, administrators told us to "Mandate that students attend tutorials, and they can catch up there." Even though the majority of teachers and administrators succumbed to implementing oppressive educational practices, I truly believe they did not have malicious intent and were unknowingly caught in a web of oppressive educational strategies. In the world of K-12 education there are innumerable teachers and administrators who dedicate their whole being to serving the best interests of students; they emit light among the darkness.

While working in these spaces, I entered a Curriculum and Instruction Master's program at The University of Texas at Austin, and I read about and heard from other teachers who had had experiences similar to, or worse than, mine. Come to find out these types of experiences were nothing new for schools that served marginalized communities, and the seedbed for maltreatment of these communities was entrenched within U.S. history. Thankfully my graduate program was armed with *woke* professors who ceaselessly worked against this normalized system of oppression. Their shared knowledge helped me identify, name and understand forms of oppression I personally experienced and learned about. During my studies, I gravitated toward critical theories like Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP), Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP), and

Critical Race Theory (CRT) to name a few (Paris and Alim, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995).

These theoretical arguments sounded great on paper, but implementing them in a classroom was a different story. Challenges arose when I tried to turn theory into practice. Challenges ranged from confronting my own internalized oppressive teaching practices to navigating through oppressive situations involving administrators and colleagues. I worked tirelessly to develop the tools of a critical educator. As much as graduate school helped me grow personally and professionally, I did not acquire concrete strategies for how to navigate my workspace as a critical educator. Therefore my research focus turned toward learning how to successfully apply these critical educational theories in the classroom. Come to find out teaching critically is an everlasting process that ebbs and flows, and it is a process that lasts until the grave. This study is about teachers who put their whole being on the line by doing everything in their power to create a more just society through education. They are critically conscious educators who work to develop their student's critical consciousness by internally and externally facing oppressive practices, ideologies, and ways of being that saturate the U.S. educational system.

Significance and Background

Across the United States students from marginalized communities are underserved by the K-12 schools they attend. Scholars who have critically analyzed education in the U.S. recognized that "Schools have always functioned in ways that rationalize the knowledge industry into class-divided tiers; that reproduce inequality,

racism, sexism, and homophobia; and that fragment democratic social relations through an emphasis on competitiveness and cultural ethnocentrism" (McLaren, 2015, (123)). Urrieta (2009) reminds us that the North American K-12 educational system maintains *whitestream* schools that focus on white Anglo-American cultural history and were "founded on the practices, principles, morals, and values of white supremacy" (1) As a result of these characteristics, K-12 schooling in the U.S. pressures marginalized students to suppress their histories, literacies, languages, and cultures to do well in school (Paris and Alim, 2017) Overall the U.S. educational system must experience structural, pedagogical, and curricular change to stop this process of assimilating marginalized communities into whiteness by trying to strip them of their cultures, identities, and languages. Change toward decentering whiteness, valuing all students equally, and development of student's critical consciousness that empowers them to fight to deconstruct oppressive systems of this magnitude is rigorously gradual, because the beneficiaries of this oppressive system do not willingly let go of power or privilege.

Social justice warriors embrace the challenge of solving this Sisyphean-like puzzle. They work together at different levels that span the gamut of formal and informal learning institutions across the United States. This study focuses on the social justice oriented work being done by teachers in K-12 schools in the U.S. Learning how they personally and socially navigate through oppressive K-12 school settings to further the development of their student's critical consciousness is a primary objective. Since educational theories and policies materialize when students and teachers interact in

classrooms, understanding this space is essential to find the missing scale in the dragon's armor, and analyzing types of curriculum and pedagogy is a good place to start.

Not all forms of curriculum and pedagogy are unhealthy, but a majority of schools in the United States implement ones that are. Oppressive curriculum, also known as the hidden curriculum, allows schools to manage and legitimize cultural and social reproduction of racial, gender, and class relations of the dominant part of society (Giroux, 1983). This type of curricular practice perpetuates the oppression of marginalized communities. Oppressive pedagogies parallel oppressive curriculum. The manner in which teachers manage a classroom, treat individual students, and perceive their students are examples of how oppressive pedagogy is embodied. Deficit perspectives encourages both of these. When a teacher has deficit perspectives of the community they serve, they view schools as politically neutral and students who experience academic shortcomings (from marginalized communities) as deficient (Valencia, 2010; Weiner, 2006). They assume "schools work and that students, parents and community need to change to conform to this already effective and equitable system" (Yosso, 2005, (75)). Deficit perspectives, oppressive pedagogies, and hidden curriculums have all been normalized in K-12 schools. Since a more than common perspective of teachers is to view schools as politically neutral spaces that treat all students equally, it is very challenging to help them understand the opposite is true, but it must be done.

In order to lift the veil from oppressive curriculum and pedagogy teachers must become critically conscious. Being critically conscious means ever deepening one's awareness of economic and sociopolitical realities shaping our lives to understand we

have the agency to renew or reconstruct them (Darder, 1991). If teachers are already critically conscious, it is important that they work to strengthen that consciousness. Critically conscious teachers, in this study are educators who have learned "to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions. . . to take action against the oppressive elements of reality." (Freire, 1970, 35). For that reason, this study asks: How do critically conscious K-12 teachers develop their student's critical consciousness while navigating normalized oppressive school settings?

Once the veil has been lifted, and critically conscious teachers see that K-12 schools are not politically neutral spaces, they can learn to implement critical pedagogies. Mariana Souto-Manning (2010) describes critical pedagogy as teaching that provides students with "the tools. . . to be able to recognize their oppressions instead of accepting them as predeterminations. . . alleviating oppressive situations, power over, and recurring oppression," and having teachers "embrace the fluidity of the roles of teacher and learner" (13). As teachers recognize that they are simultaneously a student and teacher, they can work to help their students develop a critical consciousness too.

Developing one's own critical consciousness and helping students develop tools to recognize and address forms of oppression that impacts their lives must be done while helping students academically succeed. Darder et al. (2017) state that, "there does not exist a formula or homogeneous representation for the universal implementation of any form of critical theory or critical pedagogy… it is precisely this distinguishing factor that supports its critical nature, and therefore its revolutionary potential and transformative possibilities" (13). Even with social justice-oriented teacher preparation programs,

professor mentorship, and a supportive network of like-minded teachers, being a critically conscious educator who implements critical pedagogies is difficult work (Picower, 2011).

Problem Statement

Oppressive curriculum and pedagogy harm students on a daily basis. Hegemony is maintained through both, and working against hegemonic oppression is not easy. Peter McClaren (2016) describes hegemony as "a struggle in which the powerful win the consent of those who are oppressed, with the oppressed unknowingly participating in their own oppression." (140) He goes on to say "The dominant class secures hegemony - the consent of the dominated-by supplying the symbols, representations, and practices of social life in such a way that the basis of social authority and the unequal relations of power and privilege remain hidden." (140) Hegemony works through ideologies in schools by legitimizing asymmetrical power relations in society, hiding these same relations, turning oppressed groups against each other, and presenting socially constructed histories as permanent fixtures. Many teachers have no idea that they are up against these processes when working in K-12 classrooms. If teachers are aware of hegemony, accepting the challenge of deconstructing these processes can be daunting for even the most courageous educators. Needless to say, many teachers accept the challenge by stepping into classrooms, because turning the other cheek only perpetuates the already dysfunctional system that does not value all students equally.

The purpose of this study is therefore to (1) understand how critically conscious educators teach critically, and help their students develop a critical consciousness (2) to provide insight into the process of critical consciousness o educators and researchers can use the findings to create a more just educational system.

The research question leading this study is:

How do critically conscious teachers help students succeed academically while nurturing their critical consciousness?

This study is about understanding what it takes to be a critically conscious educator who fights to develop their student's critical consciousness in K-12 schools. Participants of the study include three K-12 educators. During the time of this study, the three taught middle school. Their combined teaching experience includes elementary, middle, and high school. Every participant teaches in Texas. I came into contact with the participants through referral sampling. I was told about their work by peers who suggested they met the criteria for inclusion in this study. After getting to know them personally and professionally, I had opportunities to ask them about their teaching perspectives. By inquiring about their pedagogical philosophies and objectives, I came to learn that they were critically conscious educators who navigated K-12 schools while working to help their students develop a critical consciousness. I was unable to observe them teaching in the classroom because this study is narrative-based, so I had to rely on the self-reported knowledge and experiences the participants shared with me. Since I was

unable to observe, I consider their stories to be a form of counter-storytelling (Delgado, 1989). While I did not see them teach, their stories still matter.

The significance of this work is that it aims to further understand what critical pedagogy looks like in the classroom through participants' self-reflection. My goals are to understand how teachers help students develop a critical consciousness, how teachers navigate work environments that do not nurture critical pedagogy, how and where teachers find refuge, and how teachers became critically conscious. This study will help contemporary and future critical educators better understand how to navigate through the spaces they work in, by accepting the challenge of teaching critically, teachers risk their physical, emotional, and mental well-being as well as their jobs.

Chapter Two: Literature Review & Theoretical Framework

Curriculum and pedagogy that harm students is nothing new. Woodson (1933) wrote about how African Americans were formally educated by curriculum and pedagogy that did not value their communities, histories, or identities and instead only worked to have them adopt Caucasian ways of being and knowing. He also described how this same process was applied to other communities of color. The sad thing is that these types of curriculums and pedagogies still operate at highly effective levels in contemporary schools. Antonia Darder (1991) has written about how schools often serve as institutions that privilege students from dominant cultures much more than students from subordinate cultures. Michael Apple (2004) has described how this privileging of dominant cultures works through culturally biased curriculum by showing how curriculum is used to preserve the knowledges, interests, and privileges of groups in power while denying less powerful groups of the same opportunities. Zeus Leonardo (2009) has also written about how White supremacy and Whiteness are perpetuated by culturally biased policies that materialize through standardized testing that is are sustained by laws like No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Standardized tests continue to be sustained by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) that became a law in 2015. However, despite the oppressive practice of high-stakes testing, there have been educators and communities that have been navigating through and resisting these pedagogical practices since they were first implemented, but doing so has not been easy.

The goal of helping students develop a critical consciousness through education became popularized by Brazilian educator and theorist, Paulo Freire. Freire (2000)

argued that critical consciousness development could be achieved through a problem-posing model of education, dialogue, and praxis. Problem-posing meant that educators helped their students recognize how the sociohistorical and cultural elements of their worlds had been constructed and impacted their lives. Instead of pouring knowledge into students like they were empty vessels, problem-posing education problematized the socially constructed circumstances of students' lives to assure that their education constructively pertained directly to their lives. Dialogue was important to this process because it situated teachers and students as a community of learners, and together through dialogue students and their teachers problem solved. Even though the teacher was the guide, student perspectives and voices were given equal weight to assure everyone's voice mattered during the learning process. Praxis is a cyclical process where a problem is identified and discussed, a plan of action is created, action is taken to solve or address the problem, reflection on the entire process occurs, and the process begins again.

Critical Pedagogy

I include Freire because his pedagogical offerings provide foundational practices that contemporary critical pedagogues use to combat oppressive school settings. In searching for how to implement this kind of pedagogy at the school I worked at I did not find the specificities needed to implement this work in my classroom. Theoretically they sounded amazing, but in practice they were much harder to implement. That is because a step-by-step guide about how to apply this work in a classroom does not exist. I had not yet come across examples of how to make these ideas work in the "real world." There

also were not instructions about navigating through standardized test preparation, unsupportive colleagues, and unsupportive administrators. Eventually I learned that not having a step-by-step guide is part of what makes Freire's approach to education so great, but at the time my practice required something more tangible.

Eventually I read about Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) (Ladson-Billings, 1995). In her article Ladson-Billings highlights theoretical pinpoints with three criteria of critically conscious teaching, which pedagogy must meet to be considered culturally relevant. Pedagogy must help students academically achieve, help students develop and exhibit cultural competence, and help students understand and critique the existing social order by developing a critical or sociohistorical consciousness. Even though academic achievement by today's standards means students must successfully complete standardized tests, it is still a reality that must be wrestled with. With contemporary and ongoing laws like No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), standardized testing at the K-12 level is still an everyday reality that must be worked with. Given this reality there are very real consequences for students, teachers, and schools that do not perform well on these tests (Leonardo, 2009; Apple, 2004).

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Working to assure student success on standard tests is a demand even the most critical pedagogues must wrestle with if they choose to operate in contemporary educational spaces. Since another impact of contemporary K-12 schooling is to violate communities by stripping marginalized students of their identity in order to have them fit

neatly into a homogenized boxes that benefit hyper privileged factions of our society (De Lissovoy, 2011), I agree with Ladson-Billings that students' identities should be valued in the classroom, and teachers should help students develop cultural competence (Ladson-Billings, 2009). In other words, students' cultural styles and values should be affirmed and appreciated. By practicing and nurturing cultural competence, the process of students maintaining cultural integrity while succeeding academically is a smoother process. The third criterion of developing a critical or sociohistorical consciousness demands that an educators pedagogy helps students to identify, discern, and critique contemporary inequities in society. After her CRP became more widely known and incorporated into the practices of many teachers, this last criterion often became watered down (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Unless teachers are critical consciousness and willing to challenge the system, the third characteristic will remain diluted in their pedagogical practice.

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

Django Paris (2012) wrote an article that lovingly critiqued CRP by arguing that while its criteria established a foundation for critical asset pedagogies to build on, CRP needed improvement. He pointed out that pedagogy that was relevant to student culture, language, and identity did not go far enough to assure that CRP practitioners sustained the linguistic and cultural competence of students' communities while helping them become proficient in dominant cultural practices. He suggested that CRP be transformed into Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP), because sustaining linguistic, cultural, and

literate pluralism is part of a more democratic educational process. He argued that sustaining student's being was more effective than being relevant to a student's being. Paris also argues that pedagogies of resistance like CSP are needed to stop the monolingual and monocultural educational practices that work to further cultural ways of being and language that place White, middle-class norms as a standard.

Django Paris and Samy Alim (2017) later took CSP to a new level. They combined forces to inform pedagogues about how CSP "seeks to perpetuate and foster-*to sustain*-linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling." (1)These theories helped me better understand the ultimate conceptual goal of critical pedagogy which is to help students recognize injustices that surround them, naming those injustices, and helping them develop tools to deconstruct those injustices As passionately as I embraced the theory and worked to implement CSP in my classroom, there were no specific examples of what this was supposed to look like in the classroom. Since I understood my own struggles with implementing CSP in the classroom, I wanted to learn about how critical pedagogues were using CSP to help their students develop a critical consciousness.

The theory of Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy is the theoretical framework I will therefore use to analyze the data of this study. CSP builds upon and furthers already existing asset-based pedagogies by focusing on the following three central tenets :

1. Extend the previous visions of asset pedagogies by demanding explicitly pluralist outcomes that are not centered on White middle-class, monolingual/monocultural norms and notions of educational achievement--and that call out the imposition of these norms as harmful to and discriminatory against many of our communities

2. Resist static, unidirectional notions of culture and race that center only on long standing cultural practices of communities without also attending to continual shifts and cultural reworkings.

3. Be willing to seriously contend with the sometimes problematic aspects of our communities even as we celebrate our progressive, social justice-oriented movements and approaches.

Since asset pedagogies focus on valuing the communities, cultures, and identities of marginalized students, CSP builds upon prior asset pedagogies so sustain the ways of being of students from marginalized communities. To assure clarity I am going to draw out a few more specificities of the tenets. CSP oriented curriculum and pedagogy aims to be unconcerned with the White gaze, and argues that avoiding the White gaze is key to sustaining who students are. To dodge the White gaze in education means to not gauge the academic success of students of color by how well they execute White middle-class norms. Instead their entire being should be nurtured and affirmed. In addition to decentering Whiteness, CSP practices also aim to decenter cisheternormative, ableist, patriarchal, xenophobic, classist, Judeo-Christian gazes. A recognition of intersecting forms of oppression is part of CSP and so are intersecting resistances.

CSP's second tenet suggests that educators recognize the fluid characteristics of culture and race. Paris and Alim argue that it is important to recognize cultural practices that remain steadfast in sustaining languages and cultures, but educators should also be willing to sustain those practices while seeing to ways that youth reinvent, build upon, intersect, and live them. The third tenet of CSP turns its look inward towards our communities to heighten critical consciousness development by maintaining constructive

ways of cultural practices, literacies, and languages while critiquing cultural, linguistic, and literate ways that further oppress marginalized communities. Overall CSP works towards creating a more just educational system for all students and practitioners.

CSP works toward a pluralistic curriculum and pedagogy that will prepare all students for the reality of a pluralistic society. This prepares all students for the ever changing world they are a part of. CSP also seeks to continue understanding the fluidity of cultures and how their past and present practices continue to change and stay the same. This goal of CSP reminds students and teachers that cultures are multidimensional. CSP's third goal of challenging unconstructive elements of all cultures helps teachers and students better themselves and their worlds. It is an appropriate framework to apply to this study because CSP aims to deconstruct oppressive elements of education while building a truly democratic education system for everyone. Critical consciousness development serves the same purpose, and this study is about understanding how educators work towards this goal. All of CSPs' characteristics can help us understand how critically conscious teachers navigate through K-12 schools while helping their children develop a critical consciousness. Even though there is not a single step-by-step process of how to implement CSP, there are systems that effectively implement theory's characteristics. These systems usually include professors, graduate students, K-12 educators, and K-12 students. One such system is known as Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR).

Youth Participatory Action Research

While researching different strategies that critically conscious educators use to teach critically, I came across YPAR (Cammarota and Fine, 2008). In their book *Revolutionizing Education: Youth Participatory Action Research In Motion* Cammarota and Fine explain how YPAR evolved from Participatory Action Research (PAR). There are several key characteristics that are distinct to PAR. The majority of PAR projects are conducted collaboratively by more than one researcher. A second characteristic is that participants in PAR projects are stakeholders of what is being researched. In education this might include teachers, parents, students, and administrators. The third characteristic is that PAR researchers apply the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT) to their research.

An important part of CRT is that it recognizes how race intersects with sexuality, class, and gender. The fourth characteristic is that the findings from the research should be critically analyzed to understand contemporary and historical systems of power, so researchers are guided toward constructive changes that improve the context being studied. The last defining characteristic is focused on social justice, because it uses the critical findings as a launchpad to develop solutions to the conditions that need improvement.

YPAR is made up of the same characteristics, but it focuses on youth and education, and it has an additional characteristic, praxis, that is used to help students critically reflect and act on their findings. In other words, YPAR helps students learn how to identify and understand their worlds, find the systemic culprits that negatively impact their lives, develop a plan of action, take action, and critically reflect on the process

(Cammarota and Fine, 2008). YPAR is highly organized. One embodiment of YPAR has high school students being prepared during a two week intensive summer course on a college campus that is managed by university professors, graduate students, and high school teachers that work with the high schoolers to provide them with a crash course in research training, and continued working with them during the school year (Morrell, Garcia, Mirra, 2016). As effective as YPAR may be, not every critical educator has access to such networks. Even though these scholars are doing great critical work, my focus was on how teachers who do not necessarily have access to such networks engage with their work.

The critical educators who experience lack of support from their administrators and or content area teammates and do not have networks like the one mentioned above are those who were recruited as participants for this study. During the American Educational Research Association (AERA) conference that took place in San Antonio, Texas in 2017, scholars on a panel described how difficult it was to teach critically at some of the public schools they had taught at in California. One of the panelists explained that teaching in oppressive K-12 work environments were so taxing that she had a miscarriage because of the stress.

This is serious work, and it is often very taxing on even the most resilient individuals because the personal and professional sacrifices that are made to do this work can result in unhealthy mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional consequences. While listening to the challenging experiences of the panelists and how they chose to not give up by persisting, their words resonated with my own challenging journey as an educator.

The intricacies of their struggle had not been revealed to me in my educational studies, and the nonlinear complexities of the strategies they used to navigate these spaces revealed insight into what life can be like for critical educators. While searching for literature to further understand the experiences of critical educators, I came across Bree Picower's work.

Teacher Activism

Bree Picower (2011) in *Resisting Compliance: Learning to Teach In a Neoliberal Context* wrote an article about a group of preservice teachers that were educated about social justice approaches to teaching in their undergraduate teacher preparation program. They were mentored during their teacher preparation program, and supported by a mentor during their first years of teaching. As part of their support network, the cohort of teachers would meet regularly to discuss their struggles with each other and their mentor. Even with this tremendous amount of support, Picower details how the teachers still struggled to implement critical forms of pedagogy because they lacked support at the campus they worked at, challenges that accompanied mandated curriculum focused on standardized tests, and the obstacles created by policies that made it hard to teach critically (Picower, 2011).

Picower shares this same research in her book *Practice What You Teach: Social Justice Education in the Classroom and the Streets* (2012). She also asserts that to be a teacher activist one must not only teach critically in a school, but must step outside of the school to work with a social justice oriented group to work toward structural changes in

the educational system (Picower, 2012). If a critical educator is involved with creating structural change outside of the school they work in that is great, but that is not a prerequisite to being a critical educator or a teacher activist. Being a critically conscious educator who is actively trying to dismantle oppressive systems and ideologies from within the classroom is a form of teacher activism. Ideology plays a large role in maintaining hegemony, so the act of challenging oppressive ideologies within K-12 classrooms is a form of teacher activism.

This is teacher activism because critical pedagogues counter oppressive ideologies with negative characteristics such as legitimation, fragmentation, dissimulation, and reification. These are four modes that negatively oriented ideologies work through in schools. Critical educators counter legitimation by teaching that systems of domination are illegitimate and unworthy of acceptance. These educators build communities to counter fragmentation. They counter dissimulation by helping students reveal systems of domination. Lastly critical educators counter reification by teaching students how to deconstruct the sociohistorical elements of their realities (McLaren, 2015).

This study fits into this body of literature by focusing on how critically conscious K-12 educators do whatever it takes to help their students develop a critical consciousness. In this vein it is connected to the pedagogical world that critical pedagogy advocates have been working toward. In that same vein it connects to the goal of fighting for the truly democratic education all students deserve. This study adds to this body of research by illuminating what the day to day struggles of critical educators looks like. It

also provides insight about how these educators became critically conscious. This is important for aspiring critical educators to understand so they have reference points during their own journeys of connecting critical consciousness with their pedagogy

Chapter Three: Methods

Qualitative Method Research Design and Rational

This study focuses on how critically conscious teachers self- reported their implementation of curriculum and pedagogy to help their students develop a critical consciousness while navigating the often times oppressive work spaces of K-12 schools in the U.S. Their work does not focus solely on helping students of color develop a critical consciousness, because students who identify as white can also develop a critical consciousness that can be used to deconstructs systems of oppression. I chose qualitative methods (Merriam, 2009; Banks, 1998; Merriam et al., 2001; Bold, 2011; Glesne, 1999) to understand how teachers interpreted their experiences as critically conscious educators, built their critically conscious worlds, and the meanings they extracted from their experiences. Critical research was the most accurate epistemological perspective to approach this study, because negotiating power, conflict, oppression, and bringing about change are very much part of what critical consciousness development is all about. Only critical research could reveal how these educators go about playing the hands they are dealt (Merriam, 2009). Critical research is defined as research that aims to change and critique society by analyzing the power dynamics of our society. It questions who has power, how power is negotiated, and what social structure maintain contemporary power distributions. By understanding these power dynamics, critical research is used to create a more just society (Merriam, 2009)

Sample & Data Collection For Interviews

Criterion and referral sampling were used in this study because not every teacher is critically conscious or works to help their students develop a critical consciousness, so participants had to meet certain criteria to participate. To participate in this study teachers had to be critically conscious practicing K-12 educators who worked to help their students develop a critical consciousness. I sought out my participants through graduate school or by word of mouth. Through graduate school I became connected with a group of critically conscious educators that supported each other's practice outside of the schools they worked at. Before this research project was conceived, I supported the group by attending meetings, contributing to pedagogical and curricular strategy development, and assisted with organizing events. During this process I became friends with the group members because professionally we shared similar struggles and had similar goals. After beginning this project, I invited some of the members to participate because I knew they were critically conscious and were committed to helping their students develop a critical consciousness. Critical consciousness in this study means an ever growing awareness of the sociohistorical, sociocultural, and economic realities (e.g., asymmetrical power relations, social structures that exclude marginalized communities, etc.) that construct our lives and by understanding our agency can be used to deconstruct and rebuild those realities (Darder, 1991; Darder et al, 2017)

In graduate school I befriended other peers who were working in other graduate programs. When I told them about my research interests, they told me about critically conscious teachers they knew, so I reached out to those teachers and invited them to

participate in this research project. Teachers were thus nominated by their acquaintances through personal referrals. It is worth mentioning that no teachers at the campus where I worked were asked to participate in this study, because none that I knew taught critically. Teachers who did participate were screened by conversations. In speaking with them about their practice I was able to determine if they met the requirements of being critically conscious educators. Parts of the criteria they had to meet were descriptions of how they taught critically, experienced K-12 work spaces as critically conscious educators, and their critical philosophies and approaches to teaching.

There were a total of three participants. In order to understand the participant's practice, data collection was gathered from semi structured interviews, emails, and informal conversations. Guiding questions were written down to assure that certain topics were addressed during the interview, but additional probing questions were asked depending on participants' responses to the original set of questions. Initial interviews were conducted in person, and follow up interviews were conducted via telephone or online conversations. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed to assure accuracy. Interviews lasted between one and one and a half hours. The in-person interviews were conducted at the participant's house and at a local coffee shops. Before conducting the interviews, a research proposal was submitted and approved by the university institutional review board (IRB). Written consent was obtained from all participants.

Data Analysis

In order to analyze the data I transcribed the interviews, read them over, and listened to them. While analyzing the information, I coded data that provided insight into the work of critically conscious educators (Glesne, 1999). From the codes I developed categories based on themes the interviews shared, and I chose to use the categories that would best help educators understand the intricate work of critical pedagogues.

Names	Age	Gender	Race	Years of Experience	Grade Level Taught During Study
Ms. Roy	**32**	**Female**	**Asian American**	**10**	**7**
Mr. Chido	**30**	**Male**	**Latino**	**4**	**Kindergarten**
Mr. Viajero	**29**	**Male**	**White**	**7**	**7**

Table 3.1: Participant Information

Positionality

For this project I was positioned as an indigenous-insider. An indigenous-insider is an individual who "endorses the unique values, perspectives, behaviors, beliefs, and knowledge of his or her indigenous community and culture and is perceived by people within the community as a legitimate community member who can speak with authority

about it" (Banks, 1998, 7). I was specifically positioned as an indigenous-insider, because I endorsed the values, beliefs, perspectives, knowledge, and behaviors of critical educators who participated in this study. Not only did I endorse elements of their practice, but I could speak definitively about the critical work they did. After being in the classroom for seven years, I intimately understood the struggles of working to develop my own critical consciousness and the critical consciousness of my students. My successes, failures, trials and tribulations in the classroom provided me with invaluable insight about what it meant to endlessly work toward perfecting my craft as a critical educator. These experiences generated my research question. By understanding the challenges that came with this kind of work, I was able to generate questions that had not been answered by the literature I had reviewed or in during my graduate coursework.

My goal became to understand how teachers navigated K-12 classrooms, strengthened their own critical consciousness, and developed the critical consciousness of their students. Even though I tried my best to implement critical pedagogies, I was only successful a portion of the time, so I wanted to better understand how other critically conscious educators succeeded at this work. My hope was that my findings would help future critical educators that have the same questions I did. Since researcher positionality can shift, there were times where I was positioned as an indigenous-outsider. Banks (1998) defined an indigenous-outsider as an individual that "was socialized within his or her community but has experienced high levels of cultural assimilation into an outsider or oppositional culture. The values, beliefs, perspectives, and knowledge of this individual are identical to those of the outside community. The indigenous-outsider is perceived by

indigenous people in the community as an outsider " (7). Characteristics that made me an indigenous-outsider were age, gender, race, sexuality, and experiential differences with teaching. (Merriam et al., 2001). Being positioned as an outsider for those reasons actually contributed to my understanding of how these educators implemented critical pedagogies.

Even though many K-12 educational settings are oppressive for critically conscious teachers and students, there are pockets of light where critical educators teach against all odds. These were the practitioners I wanted to learn more about, because these practitioners sculpted critical pedagogy from blocks of oppressive stone. My own experiences trying to strengthen my critical pedagogy guided this approach. Growing up as a Latino who attended public schools my whole life, I never felt like I was part of the mainstream school culture. I remember often disengaging from curriculum because it did not speak to me. I also remember getting into trouble for reasons that were blown out of proportion. For example, in middle school I was horseplaying with a friend in the hallway. We were in the same class, and our teacher, who was an older white man, told us to stop and took us to the office. In his report he said we were throwing punches, and the assistant principal refused to listen when we explained that we had not thrown any punches. As a result, we were given out of school suspension. This was just one example. I tell this story because later on as a teacher I noticed that only students of color were being sent out into the hallways for disrupting class, being yelled at by teachers, given referrals for minor infractions that were misunderstandings by the teacher, sent to alternative schools, and treated unfairly by campus police.

Upon reflecting on my own experiences as a Latino who struggled to navigate through K-12 educational spaces, it frustrated me to see these students of color being treated this way. I knew something was wrong, and I knew I had to do something about it. At the beginning I did everything in my power to help students academically succeed and navigate through school. Sometimes disruptive students reminded me of me when I was younger, and I would work hard to understand where they were coming from so I could help them. We would even have conversations about how to navigate other teachers' classrooms. I would not speak badly of their other teachers, but I would try to help the student understand how to work with the different personalities their teachers had. All this happened before I began a Master's program.

After beginning the program, I learned how to name what I was experiencing, that I was not the only one struggling to help marginalized students, and that there was something more I could do about the situation. Critical approaches to pedagogy were the theoretical tools I felt could remedy the situation. Trying to implement the theories I was learning about in graduate school was very challenging. Being able to name the causes of why students were being treated was refreshing, but addressing those causes pedagogically was hard.

As a Chicano with a middle-class background working at Title One campuses, I encountered administrators that did not support critical pedagogy, colleagues who refused to collaborate with me because I fought for a socially just curriculum, administrators that did everything they could to control curriculum development, and parents who

complained about critical conversations addressing Queer identities. These are just a few experiences that made it challenging to teach critically.

At the campus I worked at for six years, the principal of the school changed three times. There were nine different assistant principals that worked there during those six years. Since the school was somewhat small, the school began with two assistant principal positions during my first year, and it changed to three during my second. Needless to say, there was a lot of teacher and administrative turnover. These constant changes made it challenging for students and teachers. Losing sight of the raw and deeply personal experiences critical educators have was not an option. I aimed to unveil the often painful processes that are a part of this work. Instead of describing the art of teaching in a romanticized way I planned to keep it real.

Kevin Kumashiro (2004) has written that teachers never fully become anti-oppressive but instead are always becoming anti-oppressive (Kumashiro, 2004), and I agree. Educators enter this profession from innumerable reasons, backgrounds and life experiences. There is no one way to approach the work of a critical educator, and anyone who implements critical forms of pedagogy within K-12 public schools in the U.S. is in some form or fashion an anti-oppressive educator, critical pedagogue, teacher activist, etc. This work aims to celebrate and better understand the craft critical pedagogues implement to the best of their abilities in what appears to be a never ending uphill battle.

Chapter Four: Findings

Findings Overview

The educators in this study work in K-12 schools to provide students with the best education possible. Many teachers go to work everyday with this same goal in mind, but theirs is a little different from that of critically conscious educators that aim to teach critically. For teachers who see K-12 schools as politically neutral learning spaces, all they have to do is show up and teach their content to the best of their abilities. On average they go about their business without critically analyzing the oppressive elements of their workspace. My intention is not to take any credit or respect away from the work of well-intentioned teachers, because teaching by itself is hard, but this work is even harder for critically conscious educators who aim to teach critically.

Their approach is different because they understand that they have to teach their content, navigate their workspace in ways that protect their job and personal well-being because not everyone is ready for critical approaches to pedagogy, and help students develop a critical awareness of their worlds while helping them develop the tools they need to right its wrongs and navigate safely through it themselves. These additional layers have very real emotional, psychological, spiritual, and physical effects on educators. That's why this work is so challenging. Again, teaching by itself is hard, but it's even harder to work in schools for critical pedagogues, because they better understand how the powers that be work to violate their entire being (De Lissovoy, 2011).

As previously mentioned, additional challenges are created by highly political curriculums and pedagogical practices that have become normalized in K-12 schools of the United States and by the teachers and administrators that are stuck in *The Matrix* (Cammarota and Fine, 2008). Critical pedagogues still choose to step into these spaces knowing that it could be at the expense of their own wellbeing. When fighting this uphill battle, they sustain wounds and continue pushing forward by pouring their heart and soul into their work. These educators know what they are up against and fight anyway. I intentionally chose to use fight as the verb describing what they do, because it is possible to lose this fight. Teachers can lose jobs, lose teaching positions, be treated badly by administrators and colleagues because of their critical approach, and burn out. In these contested spaces is where these participants work, and because of their agency they survive.

This study confirms that critical educators need to "play the game" (Urrieta, 2010 in order to operate within K-12 educational spaces. It also confirms that neoliberalism is a powerful force that is difficult to work against because of the laws, policies, and mandates that it materializes through (De Lissovoy, 2015; Picower, 2012; Picower, 2011). The findings of this study challenge the notions of what it means to be a teacher activist (Picower, 2012). Some scholars have insisted that teachers must be involved with activism outside of the schools they work in, but the findings of this study show that a critical pedagogue working in a classroom is a form of teacher activism. This study also extends upon previous studies that could benefit from a more extensive explanation about how educators became critically conscious. When I read Delgado Bernal and Solorzano's

(2001) article about transformational resistance (Solorzano and Delgado Bernal; 2001), more information about their participant's critical consciousness development would have been helpful in understanding how they reached their different levels of consciousness.

I provide a few successful examples of my participants' work, but they constructed those opportunities by working against oppressively normalized grain. They did so by addressing internalized forms of oppression, creating and seeking opportunities to have critical conversations with students, resisting urges to buy into oppressive practices, and trying to reflect on the effectiveness of their critical practice. These struggles were both internal and external. They were not always successful, and their successes numerically matched their defeats, but they still moved forward by understanding defeat mixed with success is part of the process. Progress was painfully slow sometimes, but they somehow struggled to find ways to keep moving even when their tanks were empty. Because of their will, "the struggles of oppressed people have demonstrated a reality beyond the one that power recognizes, a reality in which those who have been injured rise again, undeterred, and in which power has not been able to control the terms of self and spirit" (De Lissovoy, 2011, 479). Overall, first-hand experience with inequality in their personal lives, awareness generated through mentorship, college coursework, and communal collaboration all contributed to the development of their critical practices.

I will now proceed to explore further nuance in my participants' narratives. These following sections will be divided into # parts: 1) becoming critically conscious, 2)

developing pedagogical strategies,, 3) navigating the terrain, 4) interacting with colleagues, 5) pedagogical strategies, and 6) evidence of critical consciousness development.

Becoming Critically Conscious

There is no single way to become critically conscious. Some people are guided directly by mentors at an early age, and some people become critically conscious by ceaselessly inquiring about aspects of society that cause them discomfort. Understanding how these educators became critically conscious can assist future and contemporary educators better understand that critical consciousness development is a process, and there is not one "right" way to go about developing one. Learning more about how others became critically conscious helps educators see they are not alone, and that the process is gradual and ongoing. Understanding how the pedagogies of critical educators are influenced by their critical consciousness development is also helpful.

An important point to remember is that becoming critically conscious is just the first step. There are teachers out there that know that something is not right about K-12 schooling. They can see that the system is not serving all students equally, they choose not to investigate further, and stay disengaged from disrupting this unfair system. There are also teachers who are critically conscious, but for whatever reason choose to not teach critically. Even after developing an understanding of how K-12 schools operated, the participants in this study chose to teach in spaces that present daunting challenges. There are similarities about how these teachers became critical educators, but each story is

unique to each participants' experiences. Processes are a major focus of this work, and understanding how others became critically conscious provides a reference point when we ourselves are becoming critically conscious. For that reason, I will now present profiles of the three participants in this study.

Mr. Chido

Mr. Chido began developing his critical consciousness during high school. As someone who identifies as a Queer Latino male, his critical consciousness was strengthened through "coming out" as being Queer and advocacy work he did during high school with fellow Latina/o classmates. In response to the bill H.R.4437 - Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005, a teacher sponsored student group called Latinos Stand Up emerged at his high school. The bill proposition generated a buzz amongst the student body because many students that made up the predominantly Latina/o student body began to worry about being, or having a relative be, deported due to being undocumented citizens of the U.S.

After hearing and feeling concerns generated by the students on campus, a teacher that taught in Spanish to native Spanish speakers took action by uniting groups of concerned students for a meeting. With her guidance, students that usually did not interact ended up collaborating. The group researched student activism from the past like the Los Angeles student walkouts from of 1968 and the work of MEChA, and they took action by setting up a walk-out of their own. By working with Latinos Stand Up, part of what Mr. Chido gained was:

A budding understanding of history, community, intersectionality and faith in youth. Also as a high achieving student I had developed pretty negative views of those outside of accelerated academic programs but their activism taught me that they did give a shit, it's just that the resources afforded to me (high quality teachers, smaller class sizes, interesting curricula) had given me a myopic view of what schooling is like for others.

In another part of the interview Chido added that another student from the group checked his privilege by telling him not to speak about struggles he did not truly understand. That was a first for Mr. Chido. Before that he had never been challenged to check his privilege. Becoming aware of his privilege, and understanding the experiences of those with fewer privileges, helped him later on when he was interacting with students, parents of students, and colleagues.

A deeply personal and life changing experience that would later contribute to Mr. Chido's critical pedagogy was when he "came out" as being Gay during his junior year. This was a crucial part of his critical awakening, and it's worth quoting at length:

Growing up I had no sense of what an adult queer life would look like. I didn't think it was even possible. I had a vague understanding of what queerness could be in some abstract abject way in the dark of my imaginary in the same way that we believe in the boogeyman: if it exists, it's likely some wretched thing that lurks in the shadows. But as grew older I began spotting evidence to support an idea that a queer position was possible and livable. Queers in some limited fashion had slowly began punctuating the media landscape, I began finding language to understand my experience and found refuge both in people who were brave enough to be out before me, and in people who embraced me when I was ready including family members, friends, and teachers. When I began to come out, I quickly learned that being out at school was easier than being out at home. At home, my queer identity was not only refuted, but it was challenged and punished. If I did not have a support system at school I would not be alive. This is largely the reason I dedicate my work to the kids who did not survive childhood, and why I think it's important for adults to visibly identify themselves in words and actions as allies.

For a moment, consider what it would be like to not feel comfortable to publicly express who you truly are until the 11th grade, and after doing so found more support from school than home. Or worse yet, think about feeling as though you could never express who you truly are. This experience later contributed to Mr. Chido's work as an educator. After connecting his critical consciousness to education, challenging heteronormativity and anti LGBTQ ideologies became a major part of his pedagogy. Unexpectedly his critical consciousness was introduced to his educator identity by one of his undergraduate professors. After high school, he entered college and pursued a degree in art education. He ended up taking her course while pursuing a degree in art education, and she challenged him to think critically about what it meant to be a teacher.

Before this class, his classes had only covered pragmatics of art instruction. Basic strategies about lesson planning and how to organize art materials for students are a couple of examples. His critical professor of art education taught differently, though.

She brought up questions about community. What is the role of community in your role as a teacher? (This) helped us understand these sort of abstract theoretical questions. . . methods to inform teaching. Looking at teaching as different ways. . .modeling different ways to facilitate discussions around race, gender, sexuality. . . I couldn't walk away from those essentially. . . ongoing conversation questions. . . She planted that seed. I haven't been able to. . .escape those questions. . . That was a big transitioning moment for me to think of myself as a critical educator. . .That sort of snowballed and I wanted to have these discussions about richness and complexity, and justice, and have the conversations about equality, and . . . I wanted to spend more time with the students. . .so I got my license and jumped right in."

It is important to note that Mr. Chido needed help connecting his critical consciousness to his pursuit of becoming a certified teacher. I emphasize this because we all start from different places, and if we fail or make a mistake during this process of

growth, it's alright. His willingness to deeply consider the new approaches to teaching that his professor offered is very important to remember. Teachers, administrators, and teacher educators that want to help their students develop a critical consciousness must remember that the process of developing one is gradual, and students need help making connections between critical consciousness and how to apply it to their own lives. There will be students that willingly consider critical perspectives, and there will be students that do not. Expect both, and work with them accordingly. Sometimes it takes some cajoling or extraction from an outside source. In this case it was a professor who introduced Mr. Chido to approach teaching in a critical way.

Ms. Roy

Mrs. Roy deepened her critical consciousness during high school after the 9/11 terror attacks in New York City. Before the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York, Mrs. Roy did not often think critically about how the world responded to her intersectional identities (Urrieta and Noblit, 2018) as a woman of color living in the United States. She explained

"I was becoming very conscious of how even though I grew up in a predominately white wealthy community. . . I'd been made to feel different in these small ways, but it was because the wealth aspect of my privilege kind of masked the harm of a lot of the racialized experiences I had. I didn't really see it for what it was until something like 9-11. Where it was like oh. . . My dad is sticking a flag in our front lawn because he's scared, and he shaved his mustache because he doesn't want to be perceived as different, and those kind of larger moments made me really conscious of race and xenophobia and all these other issues and islamophobia. Even though my family wasn't Muslim, just being brown in America was scary."

These experiences with xenophobia and islamophobia drove Ms. Roy to further awaken parts of her critical consciousness to better understand oppression she previously felt but could not see. She said

"I sought out the literature. I read the autobiography of Malcolm X, and that became part of my critical consciousness and development, and I would read tons of. . .progressive leftist writers like Arundhati Roy who's a famous Indian writer. I read a lot of anti war stuff. . .That's when I started reading the newspaper all the time. That's when I got a subscription to The Nation. . . I was like super critically conscious as a high schooler. . ."

After high school, Ms. Roy entered college and briefly lost sight of this critical consciousness development to pursue what she perceived as adult responsibilities like finding a job and making money. She reasoned that it was time to set more critical interests aside. Her critical consciousness did not allow her to stray too far though, because it led to her decision to pursuing the teaching profession as an undergraduate student. Mrs. Roy said,

"I got involved in teaching that first summer after my first year in college, and I was like "Oh I love teaching this is awesome! And then being in that space I got very familiar with Teach for America. Then I became very familiar with Teach for America's mission of being like "Education is the civil rights movement of our generation." The kind of language they used connected with my ideologies."

After becoming certified, she began teaching with an uncritical approach. She assumed because she knew the content she could teach the content. This approach worked for the first few years, but she eventually noticed something was not right about the educational system, and things really came to a head during her fourth year as a teacher. She said

"I started realizing it is completely insane how we dehumanize these kids every day. . . I didn't have the language like "dehumanize," but I was like why are we constantly

micromanaging them? . . . I had seriously thought that I had chosen the wrong profession like maybe I wasn't meant to be a teacher. . . These kids hate me, and I'm not good at this. I went through all of that. . . Then I realized, no, it's not me. It's the system they have created here that is utterly dehumanizing."

Over the years she taught in different school settings; each setting provided different encounters with oppressive teaching practices and perspectives, and because of who she was she used these experiences as learning opportunities. After six years of teaching, Ms. Roy began a Master's program in Curriculum and Instruction.

Mr. Viajero

Sometimes individuals develop a critical consciousness at a young age. Mr. Viajero is one of these individuals. He was raised by a critical educator. His mother taught him about his privileges from an early age. When I inquired about how he began to develop a critical consciousness, Mr. Viajero explained that his mom was responsible for helping him develop a critical consciousness. He said

a lot of it came from my mom, just because she was a critical educator herself and she would . . . put me into these situations where I would learn about my privileges as a male. She would explain to me how she didn't have the same privileges or she would take me to lectures on campus and I would listen to people speak about their experiences. . . These lessons occurred all throughout my life. A lot of these conversations surrounded experiences that my mom had throughout her life where gender had an influence. When I first began participating in school sports, she reminded me that the only reason she was able to run track in high school was because Title IX was introduced that particular year. This was something that never came to my mind because I just simply played sports and didn't think it was anything special or privileged.

Title IX is a law that prohibits educational institutions that are federally funded from discriminating against employees or students because of their sex. The fact that this

law was not enacted until 1972 says a lot about how long it takes to make socially just progress in the U.S. How long had women in these institutions been overtly discriminated against before then, and how many are covertly discriminated against now?. Thankfully Mr. Viajero's mom was quick to help him recognize his privileges. Eventually these seeds of critical consciousness bore fruit in his teaching pedagogy. The one privilege he was not granted had to do with physical ability. Severe asthma plagued his youth by limiting his ability to participate in sports like American football. Living near an agricultural community that would burn excess crops contributed to his already troubling condition. Since he was privy to recognizing his privileges, this lack of privilege helped him as a critical educator after he started teaching. He shared that:

having the experience of being limited because of my asthma was virtually the only aspect of my life limiting my privilege. When I first began teaching, I felt as though my students struggled because of their inability to demonstrate what I would have considered at the time to be "basic good-student skills". As I experienced more moments where (I) exhibited my own privileges as an educator, reflecting on how my childhood asthma limited my ability to play sports, allowed me to understand that my students simply weren't going to enter their education in the exact same way I did.

Even though his experience with asthma was not akin to overt racism, sexim, or classism, it contributed to his pedagogy because he recognized that he should not expect his students to practice the cultural norms he expected them to, but instead he realized his students were playing the game differently than he was accustomed to just like his asthma forced him to play the game a bit differently too. Not long after he had been teaching is when he linked his critical consciousness with pedagogy. He said:

...it definitely started not long after my teaching career began. We would hold weekly class discussions to check-in with each other about whatever the students wanted to talk

about, but typically contemporary social issues. One student shared quite a bit about their personal life and the various obstacles they've encountered, which resulted in quite a few students being brought to tears. Sometimes there is the temptation to un-critically offer potential solutions to someone's problems, however in this moment I felt it would be a more critical practice to fully listen to their situation and acknowledge it, rather than to quickly offer a course of action to supposedly make it better.

Having the gut feeling that he should avoid his urge to respond un-critically came from having a critical consciousness. By mentioning that he had this urge informs educators that it is highly likely that they too will have an urge to respond in a way that is easier because it is un-critical, but educators should avoid that choice like Mr. Viajero did. That is an easy way out because that first choice gives educators a quick and easy way out instead of investigating the issue at hand in a deeper way, which is part of critical pedagogy. There are exceptions. If the student's issue requires professionals with credentials you do not have, be sure to connect the student with them.

Developing Pedagogical Strategies

By keeping in mind that there is no single way to develop critical pedagogical strategies, educators can understand that it is alright to begin from where they are at, and different settings require different strategies and approaches. Descriptions about how each participant became critically conscious was covered earlier, but it is helpful to dig a little deeper into each participant's pedagogical trajectory, so we can better understand how they developed their pedagogical strategies. The pedagogical strategies of these three educators were heavily influenced by their undergraduate and graduate coursework. When they learned about critical pedagogical approaches to education and began

developing their own strategies, they had their personal experiences with becoming critically conscious to fall back on. Personal experiences, direct exposure to critical content, and initiative all played a role in helping them develop pedagogical strategies of their own.

Mr. Chido

Mr. Chido came to develop his pedagogical strategies from his training as an undergraduate pursuing his art education degree and certification. Because of his positive experience with art class during high school and the fact that art is not assessed through standardized testing, he chose art as his content area. As mentioned earlier, a critical professor helped open his eyes to teaching critically. She helped him learn to play the game by teaching him how to make TEKS work for his critical practice. He said:

I remember my mentor in undergrad who first introduced me to critical pedagogy late in my undergrad years who told me that TEKS could be easily bent and twisted to justify your work, but as I began implementing critical methods, I began to see that the TEKS needed very little bending and twisting to justify what/how I was teaching,

It is important to take a step back for a moment to understand why Mr. Chido decided to teach art

in the first place. During the interview he spoke about how school was a supportive space for him after he "came out." His art instructor's class was one of those safe spaces. The safety she provided and the nature of art education led to him choosing that path. When I asked about why he chose art education, he spoke about both by saying:

Ms. Williams validated my queerness, my femininity. . . She was honest with us and treated us like people. . . I had come out to my parents. . . and things were brutal and hostile at home. . .She told me I was going to be okay. That I was going to make it. . . She

also followed up with me in college. . .I liked the role my teacher played there giving me space to work through some shit and telling me I'm going to be okay. I also didn't want to deal with standardized testing.

Ms. Williams' actions, her well-intentioned approach toward art education, and the critical perspectives she provided created the alchemy for developing critical pedagogical strategies. It is important to notice that he said nothing about his teacher teaching critically, yet her actions still made a world of difference in his life. Without calling it Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy, his teacher affirmed Mr. Chido's identity at a critical moment in his life, and she nurtured it in her classroom by accepting him as he was. She was still teaching in a critically conscious way without overtly calling out systems of oppression. This is why authentic caring is so important (Valenzuela, 2010). If teachers deeply care about serving students, the process of becoming a critical educator will seem more approachable, because authentically caring teachers tend to do what is in the best interest of all students.

Ms. Roy

For Ms. Roy, after sixy years of teaching, she knew something was not right about the education system she had dedicated herself to. Mrs. Roy described how students were dehumanized by teachers and administrators. When she finally became fed up, she responded to the inhumane treatment of students by resisting the system herself. She expressed this during the interview by sharing that:

I realized, no, it's not me. It's the system they have created here that is utterly dehumanizing. . . I just took the approach . . . of just being really subversive with the kids.

Like "Hey guys, I know we're supposed to walk to breakfast all silently, but I don't care if you talk, but if you see Mr. Gonzales come over here, just get quite so we don't get yelled at," because. . .he would always yell at the kids. . .I just didn't want to play that game anymore. . . and. . . changed my interactions with students accordingly. . . I would just treat them like a human being and . . . care about them. . . not scream at them, ever. . . I also loved my curriculum. I loved creating curriculum that felt interesting to the students that made them want to learn. . .We would. . .talk about something happening in our community, or. . .something that is normal for teenagers to experience in their daily lives. . . It was an. . .inadvertent, non-academic, non-theoretical founded way that I kind of realized. "Oh, culturally relevant curriculum is effective." without the language to call it that, I kind of figured it out through these six years of teaching, and can look back on it and call it what it was, but I didn't know that's what I was doing at the time. . .I applied to graduate school. . . to get my master's in education. . . My first class. . .was advanced multiculturalism. . .and I was reading all . . . these things that were just challenging everything I understood (about teaching). . .I was immediately able to take what I was reading and incorporate it into my curriculum. I was constantly revamping things and changing things. . .It was so transformative. . .From there on out, my curriculum has looked vastly different from. . . how I used to approach curriculum.

Mrs. Roy was not introduced to critical pedagogy by her teacher preparation program. It was only after noticing that students were being treated badly that she could tell something was amiss. Given her critical caring spirit and internal compass that pointed toward equity, Ms. Roy responded accordingly to how students were being treated. After feeling stagnant, she entered graduate school, she absorbed critical perspectives toward education, and she developed pedagogical strategies required to teach critically. Though it is no fault of hers, it is frustrating that it took six years of teaching before she learned about critical pedagogies.

Mr. Viajero

For Mr. Viajero, noticing that something was not right about the way students were managed at the school he worked at and through his Master's program developed

pedagogical strategies that were critical. Mr. Viajero spoke about how graduate school helped him develop a critical approach to valuing the perspectives, identities, and cultures of students. This contributed to strategic pedagogical development, and this approach aligns with Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy's criteria of sustaining student identities, literacies and cultures. He said:

I think our graduate program definitely helped because I didn't really know what an epistemology was until I had it contextualize in my daily practice as a teacher. I didn't know what an ontology was until I studied belief systems of different cultures. I think knowing it on a theoretical level is also crucial because you can look at a practical application of a classroom and give a kid praise for arriving at an answer in the way that they authentically do if it's authentic to the culture or belief system, but I think until you realize that's going on with every single one of your students simultaneously, then regardless of whether you recognize it or not, that's something that's happening on a daily basis. . . Unfortunately the way our system of education is often structured, we're looking to conform all those thoughts and beliefs into a similar process or a similar culture or a standard in which we're trying to measure them, and what happens in that discrepancy between the standard that we're looking for and the diversity of all the different knowledges that are present in our classroom, we often step on their toes, cut them off, or we silence the perspectives that they're bringing to the table that can help other students, or can help us, or can help the world if they're acknowledged and brought to light.

By understanding theories about epistemologies and ontologies, Mr. Viajero is able to praise and affirm students' ways of being and communicating. He does so by supporting students use of agency when they endeavor to arrive at an answer in a way that works for them. A teacher who has bought into the rigidly normalized view that there is only one correct way to answer a question would move quickly to shut down a student's organic approach if it did not meet the standard format. This action would attempt to deny, instead of affirm, a student's epistemological or ontological being. The culturally sustaining approach Mr. Viajero takes respects student's agency and values

student resistance. This strategic pedagogy even identifies student's agentic resistance as a language being spoken in response to power dynamics that classrooms create. Like a criticalist, Mr. Viajero understands that perspectives in a classroom are mediated by sociohistorically constructed relations of power (Gal et al., 2014).

This approach allows Mr. Viajero to disrupt the power relations that have been normalized between teachers and students. Whether your epistemological perspective allows you to be aware of what is taking place or not, students are communicating who they are in ways that are best for them on a daily basis. If teachers do not capitalize on that, they are doing their students a disservice. Mr. Viajero acknowledges that teachers get caught up in neglecting student identities in order to meet a standardized requirement. This is also an example of CSP because it acknowledges and challenges the dominant culture of teaching in a neoliberal era. This did not overtly occur in his practice until he gained knowledge from graduate school and carried the theories into the classroom. Educators must actively and consistently work on developing CSP lenses that enable them to see these opportunities to affirm the beings of their students. The critical consciousness development he received from his mother, the critical approach to pedagogy he obtained in graduate school, and his teaching experience all contributed to him strategically assuring his students were not oppressed by the educational system they were being schooled in. To explain a cognitive process that helped him develop his strategic pedagogical approach he said:

I've noticed this same occurrence in virtually every educational setting that I've been a part of for long enough to notice. At some point, the culture, atmosphere, or environment of a classroom or educational space that someone creates is always

inevitably challenged. When this occurs, we are often tempted as educators to rigidly cling to the existing system or routine that we've developed with our students, however by resisting, they are creating a potential dialogue for how to perhaps more critically behave within the existing system. When I notice that this resistance is occurring from far fewer students than those who are merely conforming to the same system, it is my role as a critical educator to reestablish this capacity for critical practices.

Mr. Viajero's strategies developed out of combining observations he made while teaching with knowledge he acquired from graduate school. He recognized the teacher habit of trying to hyper control their classroom by reverting back to student behavior that makes teachers feel comfortable. By recognizing this pattern he works to validate student resistance as a form of communication, and he changes his approach if he notices students are becoming too complacent, because he understands the importance of listening to and affirming what students are communicating by resisting.

Navigating The Terrain

As a critical educator, working in environments among colleagues and administrators that prefer swimming in the whitestream, mandated standardized test preparation curriculum that promotes Whiteness, and the personal roller coaster that accompanies navigating the whitestreams' white water rapids is difficult work. Teachers who participated in this study shared strategies they have used to navigate this rough terrain. In order to communicate with parents, other teachers, and administrators they had to "play the game" (Urrieta, 2010). Playing the game in this study means that participants did what they needed to do in order to get the job done. This means that they sometimes had to focus on developing curriculum focused solely on test preparation, not talk about

critical approaches to teaching because colleagues were not open to those conversations, carefully avoid administrators that were out to get them, and take time to heal from psychological or emotional wounds they sustained from navigating these moments.

The thing is that there is no specific guide to playing the game, and situations require different navigational techniques. There are also K-12 settings that are more supportive than others. Maybe a critical educator has supportive colleagues and administrators. If that is the case, critical approaches to teaching are less stressful to navigate through. The sad part is that these types of supportive environments are not readily available for critical educators on K-12 campuses, but they are readily available for teachers that only want to swim in the whitestream. Participants described their successes and failures in hopes that it will guide contemporary and future critical educators navigate whatever the campuses they step into.

Ms. Roy

Sometimes the K-12 work environments can be so oppressive that critical educators have to seek refuge elsewhere in order to continue their work. For example, although her students motivated her to keep fighting, Ms. Roy needed collegial support, and enough was not being provided at the campus she worked at. Feeling the emotional and psychological impact from the lack of support for the critical work she was doing, she found respite in graduate school. The support Ms. Roy found during her Master's program was pivotal in helping her continue her journey as a critical educator. It turns out that sometimes you have to step away from the terrain so you can return to it later and

continue your journey. In graduate school Ms. Roy found fellow graduate students and professors who affirmed, shared, and empathized with her experiences. She exclaimed:

My grad school classes were like therapy essentially, because I wasn't the only person experiencing this. . . Every teacher who I was taking grad school classes with was experiencing some level of . . . this nonsense from their administrators or from colleagues. . . It was awesome to talk to teachers who could empathize, and maybe weren't experiencing the exact same things and didn't have the exact same administrators, but at least understood where I was coming from. . . The fact that I could say what was going on, and I was believed. . . I could go into my grad school classes and the assumption was that I was telling the truth and that I was doing what was in the best interest for the students, so it was super important to have that. I'm sure I would have not survived if I didn't have that grad school space.

Being listened to and affirmed by like-minded educators that have similar experiences is essential to sustaining one's practice. We cannot do this work alone, and critical educators need sustenance just like the students they serve. I understand that everyone does not have immediate access to graduate classes, but this example serves to emphasize the importance of finding a support network and shows that the network you find does not necessarily have to be at the campus you work at. If aspiring, or practicing, critical educators do not have access to university support networks, another place to find like-minded educators is at district mandated, or voluntary, professional development (PD). After voicing her critical perspectives at a district PD, a fellow critical educator took notice of Ms. Roy and introduced himself. They continued their conversation over lunch and it went something like this,

I really want there to be a way for us to connect as educators, because I see that you know what you're talking about, and I'm aligned with what you're talking about, and I know there are other teachers who are like minded, but I don't know that "we" know that the rest of us are out there." and I was like " Yeah, I know, it's very scary to feel very isolated when you're the only one on your campus talking like this or pushing back against really problematic, oppressive comments and ideas and systems. . . From that we

had the idea to invite the people we knew would be interested in forming a kind of support network of some kind.

They went on to form a supportive group of critical educators. This group's goals became to alter the education system by dismantling systems that perpetuate inequality, provide a support network for new and seasoned teachers geared toward CSP, develop strategies for teachers and students to create schools and classrooms that welcome CSP, and generate critical dialogue with students, teachers, and community members about critically examining forms of oppression that impact their experiences at school and in the community. She further expressed the importance of the group by saying,

"*As long as I'm in education, I will be interested in maintaining this group, because I know that doing what I do would be a lot harder without it, and I don't want teachers to go through what I experienced. . . or feel like they don't have that network, because I can only imagine how much more terrifying it would have been if I didn't have grad school or I didn't have TheCypher to have experienced what I did at Nixon's. That would have been pretty awful. . . I never want a teacher to feel like they have to go through that alone."*

Graduate school and TheCypher were essential to sustaining her practice for Ms. Roy. They were the breaths of fresh air she needed to survive her asphyxiating work environment. In general, finding a support network is important, but finding a support network of educators that share your struggles can be even more helpful. A caveat against assuming this happened overnight is that Ms. Roy had been teaching for six years before going to graduate school, and she encountered the co-creator of TheCypher by being outspoken. Finding support networks of critical educators is challenging, but they exist, and they will help sustain teachers' critical efforts.

Mr. Chido

Communicating with students' parents is an important part of teaching at the K-12 level. Sometimes helping parents understand your critical approach to pedagogy can be challenging if they have not developed a critical consciousness themselves. As part of his critical work, Mr. Chido addressed queer identities and different familial structures to counter heteronormative ideologies. He used childrens' books like The Family Book by Todd Parr and El Vestido De Mamá by Dani Umpi and Rodrigo Moraes. In response to his usage of these books and conversations about querness that were being had in his class, a student's mother asked to meet with him to discuss his curriculum. Mr. Chido said:

My first reaction was "Aw, shit. Here it is. Put your activist boots on . . . but they were really just . . . questions . . . I told her that. . .I chose high quality picture books, that a privileged a wide range of representation, and that my literature selections are generally thematically organized around a learning unit (in this case "Families".)

She then disclosed that she and her daughter had recently visited a relative (a cousin I think) who does gender queerly; in her words "he dresses like a girl". She also mentioned that prior to the visit she had asked her cousin "to dress like a boy" fearing that her little girl wouldn't be able to understand, or be confused about how to address her cousin, and overall not knowing how to have that conversation in the first place. I told her not to underestimate the potential of children to understand difficult topics, to see people as they are, and to learn about people different from her. Things got progressively more emotional as she told me she wants to do right by her kids, and wants the best for her daughter, and that she had the best intentions to have this conversation sometime but didn't know how, and that she feels bad about disrespecting her cousin by asking them to not be themselves. I told her I understood where she was coming from, and that many of those same feelings motivate me do teach these kinds of lessons about difference, and that parents who have attended some of my workshops have echoed many of the same insecurities and unknowns, and that most importantly many kids do not survive childhood precisely because of the lack of representation. We cried together for a few minutes before laughing and thanking each other for listening. . .That was genuinely a touching moment I had with her. . . that was a first. . . It felt good.

When teaching critically by addressing racism, queerness, class, etc., interactions with parents are not always this constructive. Because of Mr. Chido's willingness to check his privilege as a teacher, his socially just approach to teaching, and his goal of helping his students develop a critical consciousness, he was able to constructively navigate a conversation that could have easily gone the other way. This is part of playing the game in an authentic way, because this kind of experience only happens if there is a genuine concern for the well-being of the students and parents that we serve as educators. While navigating this terrain, Mr. Chido implemented CSP by helping his student, and his student's mother, by countering heteronormative ideologies and helping the child's mother recognize how she was not the only one being impacted by the negative elements of heteronormative culture. This experience required courage and vulnerability from Mr. Chido. If an educator plans to teach critically, they should prepare to have similar conversations, and administrators who want to help critical educators should support the teachers having these conversations.

Mr. Viajero

As a critically conscious educator working in public schools that maintain hegemony, learning to play the game or jumping through hoops is essential for survival. Even though parts of the job consist of ensuring students succeed on standardized tests, Mr. Viajero understood that playing that part of the game was mandatory if he wished to work as a teacher in that space. This is considered part of playing the game because standardized tests support Whiteness (Leonardo, 2009). Being a critical educator and

preparing marginalized students for standardized tests are contradictory, but it is a given that this paradigm must be accepted to work in public K-12 settings. He addressed the reality of this contradiction by saying:

You have to be realistic about what you have to do as a professional. Sometimes my focus is on how can I get these numbers (test scores) up, rather than make these better individuals or better members of the community? . . I think that's . . . kind of the challenge, because you obviously want both, but you can definitely get one without the other. You can get one at the expense of the other.

This admission exemplifies how even critical educators cannot avoid the oppressive reality they work in and how saturated the educational system has become by oppressive practices. Actively preparing students for a standardized test when you know that test does not have their best interest in mind is a hard pill to swallow, but educators like Mr. Viajero understand that preparing students to succeed on standardized tests is part of the deal. He also recognizes that our personal lives can impact our practice. This perspective helps educators understand that the personal lives of our students impact their classroom interactions as well. Mr. Viajero addresses this dynamic process below.

You might be having difficulties in your life sometimes that are causing you to not mesh with your students or you may be approaching things differently than you should be, so you need to collaborate with different teachers. . . I think keeping the perspective that it's an ongoing struggle, and nobody's perfect, neither your students nor yourself nor whatever strategy is the perfect one out there, and that it just takes time. It takes effort. It takes reflection a lot of the time. . . Sometimes your class just ended, and boom! We gotta figure out what we're gonna do next week, go go go. I think reflection is really a key part, because as a critical educator you don't have a planning period dedicated to reflection. You have to take that time diligently and effectively and purposefully even if the pressures of the education system are breathing down your neck. I think it's understanding what's out there and being realistic about what you have to do as a professional, but also understanding that just because something isn't working out doesn't mean there isn't a solution somewhere, and you're probably going to have to look in a different space than you were looking before.

Being realistic about how teachers are human too, acknowledging that strengthening your practice is ongoing, mistakes will occur, reflection is key, and how maintaining hope is important are all key to understanding how critically conscious educators navigate the terrain. It is hard to not let personal struggles impact your teaching, but this is an important skill to acquire. There is another side to this coin. Sometimes you can use your personal struggles in the curriculum, and use them to generate dialogue with students, and this process is one that will require management throughout ones pedagogical career. Another important takeaway is that reflection is key to critical pedagogy, because reflection is a necessary part of praxis, and praxis is imperative to creating change. Researchers and educators can talk about reflection all day, but implementing it under pressure is another story, and hope is required to make that happen (Duncan-Andrade, 2009). The manner in which Mr. Viajero navigates the terrain relates to CSP by recognizing negative characteristics of teaching, countering deficit perspectives toward students, and being open to understanding students' experiences so that their identities are sustained.

Interacting With Colleagues

In this section we will gain insight into the helpful, and not so helpful, conversations these critical educators had with their colleagues or administrators about teaching critically. Understanding how to navigate these conversations is important, because the relationships teachers have with their colleagues and administrators can have a direct impact on how difficult teaching critically can become. Even without proposing

critical approaches to teaching, teachers still have to learn how to navigate through the pedagogical philosophies of their colleagues. Sometimes these interactions will help, and sometimes they will complicate things. The important thing to remember is that there are ways to navigate through them safely.

Ms. Roy

Ms. Roy shared interactions that were fruitful and ones that bore less fruit. A key takeaway from her experiences is that she remained optimistic, and she learned to not over exert herself with colleagues that were not on the same critical page she was on. When she brought up critical approaches to teaching, her colleagues did not always understand. She said:

Teachers who did not understand this approach oftentimes used phrases such as "I want to do what is best for students" or "I don't want students to get worked up" as a defense mechanism against encouraging critical thinking. Others would say "I don't want to appear partisan in my teaching" when I would encourage them to advocate for their students' basic rights. This was particularly the case during the ICE raids in February of 2017; teachers believed that handing out information about immigrant rights was "too partisan"—as did my administration.

I saw my primary role as educating students, not colleagues. I did not force critical conversations with adult peers when I knew that these conversations would not be welcomed. The only times I intervened were times when I felt that teachers were infringing upon students' rights. For example, during a whole-grade assembly, an 8th grade teacher began reprimanding students for not standing during the pledge of allegiance. I interrupted her and told her that her comments were inappropriate and a violation of students' rights.

Again, a key takeaway from this excerpt is to not force colleagues into conversational territory they do not want to engage in. Another takeaway is keeping your number one job first, which is to educate students. Serving students is the reason we are

there in the first place. Notice how Ms. Roy chose her battles. Instead of externally showing frustration, or challenging her colleagues perspectives, every time one of her colleagues did something she was not in agreement with, she chose specific moments to engage. That is another key to navigating through conversations about critical approaches to pedagogy. In addition to having unsupportive colleagues, there were also supportive ones, and sometimes all it took was one to help another educator along their critical journey. To clarify this point Ms. Roy said:

My supportive colleagues were one of the main reasons I was able to persist at that school . . . They gave me additional insights based on what they knew and provided me with the emotional support and encouragement that I needed.
Mrs. Amistad taught in the classroom across the hall and frequently came into my room (while I was teaching and during my off periods) to keep me updated on relevant information, provide me with feedback on lessons, and encourage me in the work that I was doing. I also did the same for her. My friendship with Mrs. Amistad helped me to survive, especially during my final year at that school.

No matter what she was going through with oppressive administrators or unsupportive colleagues, it only took one other teacher to help see her through the end of the year. Whatever the oppressive conditions of a school look like, there will be at least one person that will be supportive. The key is to finding that person or persons. Regardless of their pedagogical approach, all educators need forms of support to carry on the important work they do.

Mr. Chido

In Mr. Chido's experience, he found himself surrounded by more supportive colleagues than ones that were unsupportive of his critical approach. Support came

mainly from one of his co-teachers and the school's principal. This provided him with opportunities to speak openly about his critical approaches to pedagogy. He even had an opportunity to help organize a teacher workshop at his campus. When I asked him about these interactions he said:

I find community with other activist teachers (whether they identify as such or not). I loved for example the endless conversations I had with my principal as we discussed and planned PD sessions for staff to find ways to improve classroom culture and move away from punitive classroom management styles. It was great to see an entire team of people seeing the URGENCY of humanizing these kids who are systematically being taught that school is not for them every time they get sent out of the class, or get yelled at, etc. Similarly I loved the collaboration that happened with my colleague last year where we each committed to having Black History Month be every month.

Not all of Mr. Chido's colleagues were supportive, though. When I asked about them he said:

So, one colleague in particular this past year was a PAIN. She had a radically different opinion of what her role as an educator was: to follow the prescribed packaged curriculum that the school provided, and little more. Time during collaborative planning meetings was seldom used to plan lessons because most of the time devoted was to placating complaints. . .about (racialized) student misbehavior. . .As the pattern continued, our team more or less began to subversively plan our lessons in two separate factions. We would come together to our obligatory "planning meeting" only to sign meeting minutes to fulfill our principal's requirements and go our separate ways with varied levels of antagonism. This tension was only made worse during moments of microaggressions (that didn't feel so 'micro') like a moment in which me and the teacher I worked well with were putting up a Black Pride display in a hallway featuring historical and contemporary Black activists. Our difficult colleague stopped in front of the display and said something along the lines of "…I have no idea who any of these people are … but it's a good thing Trump is going to make everything better now, even for African Americans…"

Mr. Chido's situation was almost opposite of Mrs. Roy's, because he had one unsupportive colleague, while his principal and other team member were in tune with his critical approach. Because of one colleagues negative attitude, division was caused among his content area team. Often times to protect their job by not crossing any

established professional etiquette lines, employees will exhibit microaggressions like the one mentioned above. The challenging characteristics of microaggressions is that they can be felt, but they cannot always be named or described in definitive ways, and the person being aggressive usually tries to explain that they were not trying to cause any harm. This happens because the perpetrator communicates their aggression covertly. I too worked with colleagues that used microaggressions against me because I did not agree with oppressive pedagogical strategies they wanted to implement. The way Mr. Chido responded by not saying anything back and keeping close to a friendly colleague was a good way to continue his practice. Another important takeaway from his interactions is how much of a difference it made for other colleagues and his principal to support him

Mr. Viajero

When I asked Mr. Viajero about his interactions with colleagues, he did not really have any negative experiences to mention, but he did discuss interactions regarding content, and he spoke about how a more seasoned teacher helped him to comfort him.

Our math department was about to compare data from a recent assessment with the chair of the department. I was a little nervous because my data was far lower than that of my colleagues, and I was attempting to gauge just how low it was with the most experienced teacher that taught the same test. She reassured me that for our specific assessment, data is typically lower because our students are not allowed to use calculators (unless they have accommodations) and that the questions on the actual state assessment are often made more difficult, to the extent that a student who knows most of the material, can make a simple mental or arithmetical mistake and suddenly receive no credit, although most of the correct work is on their scratch paper. In this teacher's pedagogy, she was teaching that even though our end-of-the-year test carried a tremendous importance, there were still many other ways to measure what our students could do. . .I felt a little bit relieved that I would not personally be in as much "trouble" as I expected given the attitude of a more experienced teacher. However, I also felt frustrated after realizing that

*our system of education in general was not as complex as needed for students, who across our district are passing an assessment less than 40% of the time on average, where this same test still played a large role in determining the future coursework that students would eventua*lly take.

A key moment from this excerpt was when Mr. Viajero realized that the veteran teacher he worked with was not focusing solely on standardized tests to measure student's academic growth. He realized that she valued other ways of assessing students, and she understood that standardized tests did not work in favor of their students. Sometimes the way to find support is to listen keenly. Just because a colleague does not overtly speak about critical pedagogies does not mean they are not privy to instructional approaches that contain critical elements. Mr. Viajero was able to pick up on these nuances because he was willing to listen. She also shared her knowledge to help relieve pressure that he put himself under. Because of her guidance, he was redirected toward his critical approach, and she helped him not get caught up in the web of oppressive circumstances that standardized tests create.

Pedagogical Strategies

In general teachers approach teaching differently. Regardless of the content educators must put their own spin on how they implement their curriculum. In other words, they have to make the curriculum theirs by implementing it in a way that is comfortable to them. They also have to tailor their curricular and pedagogical approaches to the needs of their students. That being said, there are definitely commonalities that you see among practitioners, and they usually revolve around nonnegotiable teaching

practices. Classroom management, lesson planning, checks for understanding, establishing a safe learning environment, developing relationships, and building community are a few of these non-negotiables.

This process sounds simpler than it is and lasts the duration of one's career. These pedagogical dynamics are the same for critical pedagogues. The only difference is that there is an extra layer to this process. Countering, deconstructing, explaining, discussing, and fighting back against oppressive pedagogies and curriculum is the additional layer. There are similarities between the critical practices of this study's participants, but there are also differences. One is able to derive connections between the development of an educator's critical consciousness and their approach to teaching critically. Below are windows into the practices of the critical educators who participated in this study.

Mr. Chido

Mr. Chido helped his students develop a critical consciousness by countering normalized heteronormative views through curriculum. One way he accomplished this was by using texts with characters that do not lead heteronormative lives. Finding books like this is definitely extra work, because heteronormative children's and teen literature dominates the market. A recent study done in 2017 by the Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC) found that out of 3,700 children's and teen books they received and analyzed, only 136 contained a significant amount of LGBTQ content (http://ccblogc.blogspot.com/2018/04/ccbc-2017-statistics-on-lgbtq.html). That is only 3.68%. With numbers like these educators must actively seek out LGBTQ centered

literature rather than having a wealth of it at their fingertips. Because of the classroom environment he established with students, students were able to feel safe when using vocabulary and hold discussions that countered heteronormativity by using children's literature as a catalyst.

When the discussion of family comes up in his class, he makes sure to discuss how families are different by including Queer coupling, heteronormative coupling, single parent households, and intergenerational households. By choosing specific books, Mr. Chido assures he addresses various familial structures in affirmative ways instead of othering the families that do not meet heteronormative expectations. One book Mr. Chido uses to accomplish this is X: A Fabulous Child's Story by Lois Gould. The story focuses on a child that lives a gender neutral identity because the parents agree to partake in a social experiment to see how people respond to a gender neutral child, and the story focuses on the child's interactions with peers and adults in the community. While a majority of the adults do not understand because they have fixed mindsets, the child's classmates are very supportive of X. By interacting with X, they indirectly learn to question gender roles and challenge gender established gender norms. Mr. Chido follows up each reading of the book with an activity where students are able to discuss the story, and collaborate to develop solutions to the challenges that the protagonist of the book encountered. Mr. Chido explained that his students usually end up siding with X like the students in the book do. He asked his students how they would go about helping X feel comfortable at school. He said:

> *"The kids ultimately sort of band together to defend X against the world. To think about kid's agency. . . I've done this for years now and the results are very encouraging. Almost always they would propose an ungendered bathroom which we already had, so they suggested identifying themselves as this is a bathroom for, according to the book,. . . boys, girls, and Xs, so like I think it's great."*

By using books like this to unpack gender norms and difference, Mr. Chido directly combats normalized views of heteronormativity, and creates a space that nurtures student's awareness and understanding of LGBTQ communities and identities. He generated these discussions with kindergartners. This is important to note because indoctrination, if you will, begins from a very young age. Teaching these students how to decenter normalized gender roles through dialogue is a powerful pedagogical tool, because this can help them begin to question other societal norms that may not work in their favor. In the above quote he also mentioned children's agency. As a critical educator we must remain cognizant of student agency. By remembering that students are agentic, teachers better understand that they can learn from their students too. This pedagogical strategy falls under the first criterion of CSP because it helps students become critically conscious by recognizing questioning gender norms as pluralist society.

Ms. Roy

Closely aligned with Mr. Chido's pedagogy addressing gender norms is Ms. Roy's pedagogy addressing heteronormativity and patriarchy. Mrs. Roy directly teaches about how forms of oppression intersect. Directly addressing sexism and patriarchy through classroom content and dialogue are two ways she helps students develop their critical consciousness. This occured when her students were analyzing Shakespeare's *A*

Midsummer Night's Dream. This was a mandated text that the school used to teach middle school Language Arts. In the story there is a father named Egeus that is very controlling of his daughter. Mrs. Roy skillfully uses the character traits of this Egeus to generate dialogue about sexism.There is also a scene in the story where a character uses a love potion on a sleeping boy that will make him fall in love with the first person he sees after waking up. In response to a student's question, Mrs. Roy jumped at the opportunity to address heteronormativity. Mrs. Roy described this moment by saying:

In this line from A Midsummer Night's Dreams Egeus, the father, said that he can dispose of his daughter how he wants. That's an example of? . . . and the kids are like "Oh, that's patriarchy!" they're able to just pull up that vocab. I'm like "Explain why that's patriarchy?" . . "Because in that time period, men were just able to treat women like property. If they were unmarried they (the women) were their father's. If they were married they was their husband's.". . One of the kids was like, "Wait Ms. P, what if they had put the magical love potion juice on the boy character and he woke up and saw the other boy first?" and I was like, "Well, think about the time period that Shakespeare was writing this. What is it called when the assumption is that all relationships are Male and Female and never male and male, and female and female?" . . They were like "heteronormativity!" So how does heteronormativity during Shakespeare's time play a role in the way that he's writing his story? And what we would assume as the audience as a heteronormative audience?" So we're able to have those discussions. It is so fun because I'm doing this with seventh grade boys and girls. . . they're mostly White, mostly affluent, some of them have LGBTQ family members, but definitely not all of them by any means. Some of them are coming from more conservative backgrounds, and it is very interesting to hear them talk through that, and it's beautiful. Most of the kids are on board. There's some resistance, but most of them are on board with it and are really. . . feeling like they are able to explain their world in a way that they couldn't before."

This conversation between Mrs. Roy and her students was very intentional on her part. During another part of the interview, she revealed that she pre-taught the vocabulary necessary to name behaviors embodied by the characters from this story. In addition Ms. Roy had established a classroom environment safe enough for students to generate conversations about forms of oppression. The intentionality with which she discussed

these topics with students is important to emphasize. In order to make this happen she had to understand patriarchy, heteronormativity, and sexism. As with any other content area, an educator must understand and be able to speak the language of their content fluently. Accomplishing this fluency requires personal growth on the part of the teacher.

The challenge with becoming fluent with content that is critical is that you must analyze how they operate within your own life to truly understand their dynamics, and this can be a painful process. It can be painful because when our critical conscious awakens we realize we have acted in certain ways that perpetuate systems of oppression, and the actions we embody are deeply tied to our identity, but going through this sometimes painful process of enlightenment is well worth it for ourselves and the sake of our youth. Ms. Roy's work exemplifies this.

Mr. Viajero

Now that we have looked at how Ms. Roy and Mr. Chido address critical topics through their content curriculum, we are going to take a look at how Mr. Viajero addresses race through his pedagogical approach to teaching. Mr. Viajero specifically addresses whiteness and the privileges it brings through his actions. Although he does not teach about Whiteness directly, it is still something he works to deconstruct. As someone who identifies as a White male, Mr. Viajero actively works do deconstruct his own whiteness by addressing his positionality as a teacher through conversations with students. Part of the reason he does this is because he is a White man teaching a math class in Spanish to a student population whose native tongue is Spanish, and he knows

that as White teacher he is positioned in a way that privileges him with power over the students in the classroom. He also understands that this positioning, if gone unaddressed, does not support the critical consciousness development of his students. He acknowledged that the first step to this process was to recognize that Whiteness and the privileges it affords exist, because it can only be strategically deconstructed after it has been identified. Mr. Viajero strategically worked on doing this internally and externally. Addressing Whiteness in the classroom he said:

I think for me, especially being a white educator in a predominately student of color populated school, the first thing that you have to do is acknowledge it, because if you don't acknowledge it verbally multiple times in front of your students. . . like this is who I am, then you're hiding behind your own whiteness. You're saying. . . I'm normal even though we're in this very racially distinct situation where there's a white teacher with power, and there are students of color which are subversive to my authority.

As a white male who has access to many privileges, recognizing, let alone deconstructing, how whiteness operates in our society is no easy task. Personally working against whiteness is very challenging when trying to develop "double images" (Seidl and Hancock, 2011). Double images are when someone who identifies as White is cognizant of their White privilege, and take notice of how they're managing that privilege while interacting with others Addressing these challenges internally is tough, because actively monitoring how you engage with the benefits of your privileges are tough, but doing so is important because giving into them only perpetuates the cycle of their continuity. This process is even more urgent for educators of students from marginalized communities, because they are directly impacted on a daily basis. This work does not come without its challenges. Even critically conscious educators like Mr. Viajero fall into the traps set by

oppressive Whitestream teaching practices that have become normalized in this profession. Mr. Viajero provided insight into this process by saying:

At the same time I feel there are these moments when I find myself engaging in whiteness, or using authority as a teacher in very white ways to predominately students of color. . . It's a constant process of being conscious of how I'm displaying myself through speech, through body language, through actions. . . I think it's really important to communicate using your student's own language. Obviously I'm fluent in the language of the oppressor. I'm fluent in academia. I'm fluent in all these different languages, but I'm not necessarily hip to the vocabulary my students operationally use on an everyday basis. . . I think it's figuring out what those behaviors are, how my students react to those behaviors, and discuss it with them. Ways that I can make myself a better teacher is combat those often unconscious reactions or engagements in whiteness.

Not only does Mr. Viajero recognize that he sometimes slips into the whitestream, but he also acknowledges the need to learn the literacies of his students. Both of these skills are part of CSP, because decentering Whiteness and sustaining the literacies of marginalized students are required to teach in a culturally sustaining way. Admissions like this are key to being a critical educator, and they reveal the struggle that CSP requires. This also helps educators understand that contradiction, successes, and failures are part of ever strengthening our practice. Acceptance of this reality is key to successfully implementing critical pedagogies, and keep in mind that this is no easy task.

Students Acquiring A Critical Consciousness

An important part of teaching anything is to assure that students are learning the content. Different content requires different checks for understanding, and different schools of thought value certain checks more than others, but checking for understanding is important nonetheless. The participants of this study assured their students acquired a

critical consciousness in different ways. Since critical consciousness development is an ongoing process, these educators applied strategies like informal verbal assessments and observations rather than short answer responses or multiple choice questions, although these were also implemented at times. The examples provided here are informal checks for understanding. I want to highlight these kinds of assessments because they hold as much value as short answer responses and multiple choice questions. If we take a moment to reflect on lessons we learned growing up outside of school, the educators that taught us those lessons never gave us a multiple choice handout, scantrons, or made us support our short answer questions with textual evidence.

Mr. Chido

Those are good and all, but they are not the end all be all. Mr. Chido applied the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) in a critical way. TEKS are the mandated skills that must be taught in Texas. Curriculum being taught in the classroom is supposed to be aligned to these TEKS. The Common Core States Standard Initiative is the equivalent to the TEKS in other states. Mr. Chido did this by applying critical content to the skill being taught. In this particular lesson he focused on decentering how nuclear families had been normalized. To check for understanding, and to see if students were becoming critically conscious about familial structures, he informally assessed students' conversations.

I connected family difference to math TEKS (Use data to create real-object and picture graphs (K.8B) We take turns graphing different classmates' families to learn about who

makes up their family and see how different families can be. Going back to the lessons/conversations about family, these conversations were rich! We all love to talk about people we love and children are no exception, as they listen to each other they are often fascinated to learn that not every home and household is like theirs ("Why do you live with your grandma?", "How many brothers do you have?", "My auntie with me too!") The times the conversations get tricky tend to be uncomfortable only for adults who want to shoehorn vocabulary and concepts back to the safety of a nuclear family. Kids struggle very little as a they come up with inventive ways to describe their worlds: a nickname for a family nanny, a "kind of like my brother" for blended and foster families, and myriad of other nuanced descriptors are simply folded into our working vocabulary during the units, the kids' language is valid and real and just as worthy to learn.

Generating dialogue with his students, and watching them generate dialogue with each other about the content showed Mr. Chido that they were becoming critically conscious about different familial structures. Not only did he lead them to conversations that decentered normalized nuclear family structure, he had them connecting the content to their personal lives. In doing this he validated students' personal lives by supporting the different familial structures they came from. A teacher that was not critical, or was not open to non-nuclear familial structures, may have disregarded what students shared or shared a deficit perspective with them. At the end of this quote Mr. Chido says something very important about critical educators. He said that the student's language regarding their families was important, valid, and worth learning. His critical approach to teaching allowed him to become a student among his students. This is not easy to do, it takes constant practice, and it is a skill that must always be strengthened. There is one more example from Mr. Chido's class that shows students using their agency by using critical vocabulary and ideologies they learned in class. He described this example by saying:

These two little girls liked listening to songs on the ipods in my listening center, and I guess they were holding hands and they were rocking in the rocking chair. And a boy walks by and he's like "You're holding hands, you're gay." and she just looks at him and

she goes, "Yeah, so what?" "Yeah I'm gay, so what?" . . . because we've had the conversation about what that means. . .there is so much richness to name these differences. To provide the kids with the vocabulary to talk about difference in an affirmative way, because often times we refer to difference as an other and not in the affirmative.

Not only did his elementary aged students understand what gay meant, she also used her agency to affirm herself and her friend. Mr. Chido did share that the two girls were friends, so it seems like the young girl was using her vocabulary and agency to resist any negative jab the boy was throwing at them, and it worked. This example shows that students were developing a critical consciousness because they understood that not being heteronormative was alright, and they appropriately applied the vocabulary they learned in class from Mr. Chido.

Ms. Roy

Ms. Roy taught her students vocabulary associated with bias and the intersectionality of our identities and how forms of oppression interact with both of these. She also taught them about systemic forms of oppression. Like Mr. Chido, she too checked for understanding, or to see if students were developing a critical consciousness through the dialogue they generated with each other and during teacher led discussions. She also used critical content while teaching the skills that were mandated by the TEKS. Here is an example of how she subverted 8th grade Social Studies TEKS to implement critical pedagogy and help develop her student's critical consciousness.

(SS TEK example 8.12.B: explain reasons for the development of the plantation system, the transatlantic slave trade, and the spread of slavery;)

Modification: Teaching what slavery is, the causes and effects, then adding in The New Jim Crow to present more depth and understanding of power structures.

After I inquired about how she assesses whether or not students are acquiring a critical consciousness she said:

When students were open to these perspectives, I hardly had to speak during a lesson. If I had done my job of providing useful texts that engaged students authentically, then they were able to have rich discussions and push each other to think critically with minimal intervention on my part. These were the most successful lessons! I felt hopeful during these discussions. There were always a few students in every class who felt uncomfortable or resentful at having to challenge dominant ways of thinking, but when I was able to see my students who were critical thinkers take the reigns during these discussions and push their peers to question strongly rooted assumptions, it was incredible. I felt most successful in moments like these. I felt hopeful that this next generation of young thinkers would be able to make meaning of this very complex world in which we live. Some students approached me about organizing a walk out on the day of Trump's inauguration. While I did not assist them in any direct planning, I did advise them to seek administrative approval; when this inevitably failed, I encouraged them to get parental support and have a clear plan of how to execute this safely and communicate their message appropriately. They came to me for advice and I was able to support their efforts through suggestions on how to organize and strategize effectively. I also was able to encourage them to remain courageous in the face of powerful forces who were trying to stop them.

Seeing students guide other students through dialogue regarding content, push each other to think critically about different perspectives showed Ms. Roy that her students were further developing a critical consciousness. The way in which they felt comfortable consulting with her about organizing a walk out is another form of proof that they were developing a critical consciousness, because taking action to change circumstances that negatively impact your reality is part of critical consciousness development. The fact that they felt comfortable approaching her also says a lot about the way she teaches critically and develops relationships with students. Students that do not like a teacher will not approach them for help.

Mr. Viajero

Mr. Viajero also checked for critical understanding by generating dialogue with his students. Having developed a critical consciousness, he understands the importance of respecting other peoples' cultures and communities. When he travels, he assures that this is something he does. As a Spanish teacher, part of his curricular approach is to teach his students the history behind the countries that use Spanish as their primary language. When doing this, he teaches them to see these cultures and nations through lenses of appreciation instead of othering them. Since there is no standardized test for his Spanish class, and his curriculum development and implementation is not hypermonitored, he takes advantage of the situation to teach in more critical ways. He said:

Honestly, I abandoned the curriculum that was provided at an early stage. I was fortunate enough that it never came up that I wasn't following the district materials, mostly because administrators, at least in my experiences as a Spanish teacher, aren't that familiar with the subject material, nor do they pick up on instances where I'm deviating. Really the only challenging aspect is having to remember all the "check-list" items that my administrators are looking for when they have their designated classroom observations that I am allowed to prepare for ahead of time.

When I asked him about how he knew his students were developing a critical consciousness

during this process, he said:

I didn't notice it as much with their vocabulary – although I teach them terms such as "gentrification", I often find that they have an existing schema/idea for what is happening in their worlds, and rather than needing the academic vocabulary to describe what's going on, they often prefer to discuss these issues in their own words.

I'm lucky enough to be the teacher that is most likely to inspire my students to travel, so if they are privileged enough travel themselves, I often touch-base with them about their experiences, and verify that they don't simply go to another place to experience its

"foreignness" or "exoticism", and rather they bear witness to a culture and a way of being that is different from their own. One student in particular went on a humanitarian/aid trip and I tried to get them to think about the ways in which we get to the point where entire communities are viewed as always needing aid.

In addition to covertly adjusting the curriculum to fit his critical approach Mr. Viajero checks for critical consciousness development through dialogue. In this case he informally checked for understanding by asking students about their traveling experience to see if they had grasped the concept of valuing other cultures and places they experienced. As a form of direct teaching, he challenged a student to problematize why certain communities are described or depicted in a way that makes it seem like they are always needing outside help. This challenge was to help the student apply their critical consciousness by critically analyzing the normalized perspectives of the community he was about to try and serve.

Overall, the participants became critically conscious early in their lives. Either a professor or graduate coursework served as the catalyst that joined their critical consciousness to pedagogy. Solidarity with like minded peers, critically managing ones pedagogical approach, and staying grounded by checking ones privilege all helped these educators navigate the terrain. By strategically using critical pedagogical strategies, all three participants were able to weave critical content into their curriculum. Not only did they use conventional and unconventional ways to assess their student's critical consciousness development, they also found ways to communicate with supportive and unsupportive colleagues. All the approaches to teaching presented in this chapter exemplified elements of Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Navigating the Terrain and Agency

Navigating the terrain is all about using one's agency to resist dominant power structures found in U.S. schools. Teachers and students use agency to create figured worlds and to navigate the figured worlds they travel to. Holland et al. (2003) define a figured world as "a socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others. Each. . .world populated by a set of agents who engage in a limited range of meaningful acts or changes of state as moved by a specific set of forces" (52). The figured worlds that critically conscious educators create (spaces for critical consciousness development), and the figured worlds they navigate through (K-12 schools), are where their agency is enacted (Holland et al., 2003). Since agency is always historically and culturally constructed (Ortner, 2006), the participants' life experiences play a big role in their ability to understand the importance of navigating through the figured worlds of school in order to teach critically. As can be understood by their stories of becoming critically conscious, their intentionally active, yet maybe subconscious agency (Ortner, 2006 (136)), may have been what guided them along their paths. This subconscious but intentional agency helped them stay on the road to critically conscious pedagogy by helping them develop a critical consciousness, pursuing a job that allowed them to serve students, helping them see that something was not right about the

schools they worked in, and their willingness to taking critical approaches toward teaching.

The inseparability of the agency of projects, and the agency of power that Ornter discusses helps us understand the navigational process these critical educators go through while teaching. K-12 schools in the U.S. are plagued by power, politics, and systems of domination. Even though it is challenging to navigate these spaces, their agency gave the participants in this study power to work within these figured worlds. All three educators engaged with an agency of projects by intentionally and strategically conversing with colleagues, interacting with students, communicating with parents, and designing their lessons in ways that countered this oppressive school system in any way possible. Even though the normalized oppressive school system was always bearing down on them, their projects of helping students develop a critical consciousness was still pursued.

While working with agency as power to resist the power of the administrators and policies they work with, they also work to manage the power that they are given as teachers. Resisting external forces is one thing, but resisting your own urges is different. Mr. Chido spoke about his urge to assume a defensive position after finding out a student's parent wanted to meet with him, Mrs. Roy spoke about changing her approach to interacting with students after seeing them systematically being treated poorly, and Mr. Viajero described how he understands the importance of deconstructing power dynamics between teachers and students, especially around Whiteness and race. Since social agents are always submerged in sociocultural and sociohistorical relations of competition,

inequality and power, their agency is always active (Ortner, 2006). Using one's agency to deconstruct internalized oppressive practices is probably the most challenging.

Costs And Risks of Navigating

The costs of navigating this rigged terrain are emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual. Even without a critical approach to teaching, these same costs apply. That is why many teachers stop teaching, especially teachers working on Title 1 campuses. In 2017 the Learning Policy Institute issued a report that revealed two thirds of teachers that leave the profession do so because they are dissatisfied with teaching because of a lack of mentoring, inadequate training, pressures from standardized test accountability measures, lack of support from administrators, salaries that are too low, and inferior teaching conditions (https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/teacher-turnover-report). This is just scratching the surface of what contributes to teacher attrition. If you add the extra layer that critical pedagogy adds to the mix, conditions become even harder to navigate through. Critical educators understand what causes poor teaching conditions, and they understand that these conditions were created and maintained by systemic oppression. That is why the costs are so high to doing critical teaching, but by using their agency critical educators find a way to make it work.

In addition to risking their health, the number one risk in doing this work is losing one's job. That is a big reason that the game must be played, because many critical educators depend on that job to put food on the table. Add children and, or, a spouse to the mix and playing the game becomes that much harder. Again, the costs of playing this

game are very real, and losing has very real consequences. This highlights the importance of training pre-service teachers for the workplace they are stepping into. Teacher educators should be training them on how to walk the tight-ropes of education.

Playing the Game

Playing the game in this study means that the participants were fully aware of how K-12 schools perpetuate forms of oppression through curricular and pedagogical practices, and they chose to continue working at their school sites anyway. In these spaces they have to navigate through intentionally and unintentionally ignorant colleagues, sometimes oppressive administrators, preparing students for standardized tests even though they know the test does not serve the best interests of their students, and they have to do all of this while meeting all of the other professional responsibilities that accompany being a certified teacher. Playing the game means to participate in a system where you play by the rules, and break them at the same time. The thing is that the rules are broken in order to serve all students equally.

The players of the game understand that the arena they play in (K-12 schools) is rigged in many ways for players like them (critically conscious educators) to lose, but they continue playing (teaching) anyway, because they know that without working to change this rigged game it will only stay the same (continuing to oppress marginalized communities). This metaphor is appropriate because rules come with just about every game that exists. The players need to learn how those rules operate, and play to the best of their ability. The main difference here is that critical pedagogues know that the rules of

the educational game actively cheat certain players (teachers and students from marginalized communities) by denying them privileges while supporting other players (teachers and students privileged by class, race, gender, sexuality, etc.), but because they know how great this game can be without preferential rules, they fight to change the rules of this game.

Teacher Strategies and CSP

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy is woven throughout the pedagogical practices of teachers that participated in this study. Locating CSP in their practice happened through direct and indirect descriptions they gave about their practices. CSP could be seen when they described actions they took in the classroom, interactions they had with colleagues on their campuses, dialogue they generated with students, and in how they navigated the overall terrain of the spaces they worked in. Even though their students showed critical consciousness development, more often than not CSP was strongly present when they spoke about the profession of teaching itself. Another important finding was that teachers they spoke about being influenced by in high school incorporated elements of CSP into their practice.

While discovering how to approach pedagogy in a critically conscious way, all three participants learned about the importance of decentering monocultural/monolingual White middle-class norms and the danger of setting these as the standards of educational achievement. Having developed a critical consciousness before entering graduate school helped them embrace critical approaches to pedagogy. Mr. Viajero, Mrs. Roy, and Mr.

Chido were all encouraged to challenge the notions of what it meant to be a teacher. Their mentors helped them recognize that teaching is about ever growing and strengthening your practice. The participants also learned that critical pedagogy is all about keeping what works, changing what does not, and creating new approaches to teaching that meet the needs of their students.

In the same vein of learning about the fluidity of educator culture, these teachers learned about the problematic aspects of teaching as a profession. Understanding that there are very problematic characteristics of the teaching community is necessary for critical educators. This realization is actually important for all educators. When learning how to become critical educators, the mentors of these participants taught them how to problematize aspects of teaching communities. This helped them manage their own approaches to teaching, and it helped them understand that not all educators are on the same page. With these realizations they work to keep skills that are useful, get rid of the ones that are not, and create new ones that meet the needs of their students.

When it comes to navigating the terrain, we saw that Mr. Chido had to carefully navigate through a conversation with his student's mother. The reason for this was because he was decentering heteronormative perspectives in his class, and instead he was countering heterosexual/monocultural norms. Through CSP he was able to promote a pluralist society by helping his students and their parents. Mr. Viajero was transparent when he shared that he succumbed to how standardized tests imposed assimilation into White middle-class norms. Because of the way that teachers are held accountable and blamed for low scores, and part of serving students is to help the become academically

successful, Mr. Viajero's excerpt shows how even critically conscious educators struggle to maintain a critical practice.

In this same vein Mr. Viajero and Mr. Chido challenge unidirectional static notions of teaching culture. Mrs. Roy also resisted unidirectional, static, and long-standing cultural practices of teaching. She remained far from being complicit about how schools operated, avoided rugged individuality that is part of neoliberalism and perpetuated by competition amongst teachers (Picower, 2011). Mrs. Roy actively challenged these characteristics by collaborating with another educator to build a support network for critical educators outside the school she worked at, and she collaborated with a supportive colleague to help her and herself. That is also how she helped challenge the sometimes problematic elements of teaching communities. While navigating the terrain, all three teachers applied CSP to the culture of teaching.

The participants' pedagogical strategies ranged from how they approach teacher student interactions to how they incorporated critical content into the curriculum. Whether it was decentering Whiteness while presenting lessons, decentering heteronormative views through content, or generating dialogue about patriarchy, all three participants demanded pluralist outcomes from themselves and their students. They also understood the importance of recognizing the fluidity of their students cultures. They did not hold one directional perspectives of their students culture. When discussing their pedagogical strategies, they did not speak about problematizing elements of their students' cultures.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

Implications for Theory

The findings of this study can add to CSP by helping researchers understand that the lense of CSP can also be applied to teachers and the culture of teaching. Teachers themselves need to understand that the culture of teaching requires pluralism in an ever changing society. Often times educators get caught up in the thought that pedagogy has to embody rigid practices (Britzman, 1986; Bulman, 2002; Vavrus, 2009). Applying a CSP lens to teacher education can help administrators as well, because a common practice is the hiring of teachers of color to serve youth of color in order to help the youth's academic performance. While the intention is good, race alone does not guarantee productive outcomes because teachers of color may only know oppressive pedagogy that reinforces an already oppressive system (Woodson, 1933).

Applying the second criterion of CSP which is to actively sustain the cultures, identities, and literacies of students can also be applied to teachers. By recognizing the importance of sustaining teachers and their practice, we can open the door of decentering whitestream teaching practices and implementing teaching practices that have sustained marginalized communities for ages. Before desegregation, it was clear to African American communities that racism was the number one enemy. Even in the face of overt racism, their segregated school curriculum focused on uplifting the African American community, and everything that principals and teachers did was to help students and themselves overcome that overtly racist system (Walker, 2000). These educators uplifted themselves and their students because they were not forced to conform into a pedagogical

box they did not fit in. Their being was sustained instead of infringed upon. The thing is that many teachers who enter the teaching profession were raised by cultural pedagogies that allowed them to navigate through the formal educational institutions they attended in the U.S. If CSP was applied to teacher education and teachers were able to freely bring their cultural pedagogies into their classrooms, our educational system would become more pluralistic. This would be a leap toward creating a truly democratic education for every student.

CSP's third tenet calls for deconstructing problematic elements of our own culture and is the most urgent step in changing how teachers are prepared. If we do not identify what is wrong with contemporary teacher education, how can we fix it? Therefore further theoretical development for CSP would be to figure out how it can be applied to teacher preparation programs too. As far as the theory of CSP itself, the best way to figure out how to improve it is by trying to implement it within the classroom. Only then can advocates of this theory identify holes in its framework.

Implications for Future Research

The primary implication for future research would be to include more critically conscious educators in the study. A larger survey of teacher experience and practice would help identify more commonalities and themes that accompany this type of work. If I have the opportunity to continue this work, I will incorporate more participants. Another implication would be to include critical practitioners from states other than Texas. This could provide opportunities to differentiate the kind of work that these

teachers implement under different conditions. A major implication is that of classroom observations. Classroom observations would have contributed to the overall insight of this study. The researcher would have been able to experience the critical practitioner's practice first hand. This would have included interactions with students, colleagues, and administrators. To add to the necessity for classroom observations, an additional implication would be to have interviewed the students of these teachers to get the student's perspective on the teacher's critical pedagogy and to understand how the student chose to apply their critical consciousness.

Implications for Teacher Education

Since most everyone entering the teaching profession is not critically conscious due to K-12 miseducation, critical consciousness development and critical pedagogies should be a focus of teacher preparation programs. Numerous colleagues I have taught with, studied with in graduate school, and collaborated with in academia have expressed that critical consciousness development was not part of their teacher preparation program. Even Mr. Chido and Ms. Roy, did not think to apply their critical consciousness to the world of teaching. Only through guidance did they think to do so. I cannot imagine how many non-critical educators become certified every year, and people wonder why there is an education debt (Ladson-Billings, 2006). The participants of this study echoed similar experiences. When some of them experienced teacher preparation coursework addressing the importance of critical consciousness and its application to education, it was during their Master's coursework. How many educational Master's programs do not incorporate

critical approaches to education? If undergraduate or alternative teacher preparation programs made coursework in critical consciousness development and critical pedagogy mandatory to graduate, teachers and students alike would be better served, but I argue that students from marginalized communities would benefit even more.

Another way that teacher preparation programs can help critical pedagogues succeed is by providing them with a support network of like-minded educators with varying years of experience. Considering the number of pre-service teachers that complete their programs every year, generating a supportive network should not be problematic. Again, the challenge will be in creating a network of critical educators. If there are only a pocket of critically minded educators in a cohort, or a small pocket of critically conscious professors teaching pre-service teachers, then those educators should locate critical educator support networks that already exist. Last but not least, teacher preparation programs can teach pedagogues how to develop a support network themselves. This can even be accomplished during the unit of a pre-service coursework. The curriculum could be centered on critical educator networks that have been established. The groups accomplishments and strategies can be analyzed, and a culminating activity could be for pre-service teachers to create one of their own so that it already exists when they enter the workforce.

In addition to providing new teachers with support networks, teacher preparation programs should help preservice teachers become well versed in the teaching legalities of the state they will be working in. This would be to assure that critical educators understood the boundaries administrators and colleagues may try to confine them to, they

will develop a better understanding of how to navigate those boundaries and be able to recognize when a rule was broken so they know when and how to defend themselves. In addition to learning the official laws of the land, it would be great if pre-service teachers, who aimed to teach critically, understood how to interact and work with colleagues and administrators who may not understand critical approaches to education. Since many pre-service educators become certified while completing their undergraduate degree, they may not have much experience in the workforce. Students that have work experience can benefit from this type of preparation too.

Principalship programs could also benefit from helping their students better understand critical pedagogy and consciousness. Often times restrictions are placed on critical pedagogues because their campus administrators do not understand the work they are doing and instead see it as a threat to whiteness and the neoliberal agenda of standardized testing (Leonardo, 2009; Picower, 2011). If campus administrators were critically conscious, thoroughly understood the purpose of critical consciousness development, the role it plays in creating a democratic society where all students are equally encouraged to succeed, they could better support teachers and effectively navigate these systems themselves instead of becoming the oppressors of teachers. As with pre-service teacher education, principalship education can be strengthened by teaching future critical administrators how to navigate oppressive systems from the position they hold.

Implications for Policy

During the writing of this thesis, the individual that holds the position of Secretary of Education of the United States has never worked as a full-time teacher and does not have any teacher certifications. With this in mind it is important to question who is getting the final say on educational policies that are approved. Imagine if it there were policies that mandated fluency in critical pedagogy for every teacher certification program, and imagine if there these same policies mandated that every teacher pass a critical pedagogy assessment before obtaining their teacher certification. With laws like NCLB and ESSA we are in dire need of policies that are theoretically oriented toward CSP. Policies that make critical pedagogy a mandatory skill that educators have would benefit our whole society by instilling authentically democratic practices in students and teachers. With the current state of glorified neoliberalism and standardized testing, theories like CSP are fighting an uphill battle. These laws alone materialize in practices that extol psychological, physical, spiritual, and emotional hardships on even the most resilient educators.

Psychological impacts caused by policies like NCLB and ESSA are understood by listening to how Mr. Viajero struggles to balance his identity as a critical pedagogue and meeting test preparation requirements in order to keep his job. Emotional impacts of oppressive policies can be understood by seeing how Ms. Roy was treated unfairly because her administrators bought into the ideology that oppressive policies normalized. And Mr. Chido's initial fear that arose when his student's mother asked to meet with him exhibits how these policies are challenging to work with for critical educators. These

examples prove that impactful educational policies do not have everyone's best interest in mind. To resolve this all stakeholders should be included and consulted before policies are implemented (Dumas and Anyon, 2006).

There is no single way to teach critically. Strategies that teachers use depend on the depth of their knowledge and the dynamics of their workplace. Even though experiences vary, there are common themes that arise from this work. Finding a support network of like-minded individuals is essential to an educators personal and professional well-being. Taking time to heal and recover is an essential part of personal and professional development. Since forms of oppression are shapeshifting, critical pedagogues must remain flexible, and keep their practice malleable to meet the challenges of an ever-changing oppressive educational landscape.

Regarding teacher practice, preservice and practicing teachers must remember that teaching is a difficult job in the first place. Adding layers of critical pedagogy and the workplace dynamics this includes into the teaching mix makes the job all the more challenging. As of now, critical pedagogy is an uphill battle. Even when a teacher has a supportive administration, helping students develop a critical consciousness is challenging. In order to do this work one must find peace in fighting an uphill battle. A professor once said that the sooner you understand that you will always be disrupting (hegemony), the sooner you will make peace with the work you are doing.

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